



## **YourEssence - Volume 1 - Chapter 1 through 31**

### **Chapter 1 - In a world...**

UniGlobal unveiled YourEssence in 2065 to rave reviews. The harmful effects of aging would be a thing of the past—no more sagging, wrinkles, soreness, or age-related diseases. The product was fast, simple, and could be made widely available. The only downside was that once you started to use it, you had to continue to use it to maintain the effects. Wall Street loved this aspect of the product, and UniGlobal shot straight to the top of the biotech industry, becoming one of the largest market-cap companies. The belief was that every human would be taking YourEssence supplements for the rest of their lives, and UniGlobal now had exclusive distribution of such a groundbreaking product.

Of course, a product like this one's existence comes with creating a seedier side. A black market for acquiring YourEssence was soon established. At first, this was to make a quick buck, but soon, a disturbing trend emerged.

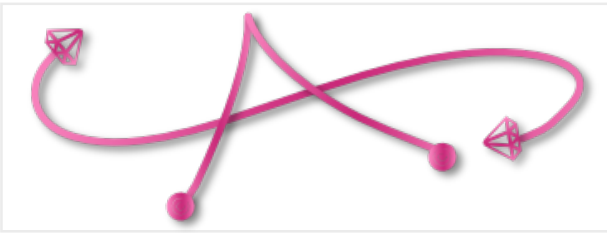
YourEssence isn't a standard pharmaceutical because you must process it at home. You effectively mix your first batch of YourEssence by providing a small DNA sample. You keep the original dose perpetually because subsequent doses are just copies of the first. This is how the product rejuvenates the body. It's effectively a time capsule of your genetic structure. Eventually, someone "accidentally" took another person's dose. Or at least there is no proof it wasn't an accident. This is where things get interesting.

Within a single day, that person transformed into an identical clone of the other person. This started the black market for trading Essences. Within months, there were rumors that it didn't matter how similar you were to the stolen Essence; you would end up a copy of that person. Height, weight, skin color, even sex. All of these were changed by administering another person's dose of YourEssence. The only drawback is that you would revert to your former self once the amount had worn off. Rumors swirled that the government would use this technology to create the ultimate spies. Celebrities would go on "hiatus," but their careers would continue with someone acting in their place. If you could imagine it, someone else

had already done it.

The race was on to find some way to detect these artificial clones, but to date, no method had emerged other than confining someone and not allowing them access to their next dose of YourEssence. As a result, taking any amount of another person's YourEssence became a crime, but this didn't stop the black market. Nor would it prevent more casual misuse at home.

YourEssence journey starts now....



## **Chapter 2 - Quarreling Lovers**

Mary Simms sat at her desk, completing the last of several pages of documents. With a weary sigh, she closed the folder from her most recent pair of patients. When Mary chose to utilize her degree in Psychology to forge a career as a marriage counselor, she had looked forward to helping people navigate life as a couple. She truly believed she was good in her role. Mary just wished there was less paperwork involved with the job. Obtaining pre-authorizations (PA) to begin therapy, filing out progress notes, and the endless billing. A quarter of her work responsibilities involved working with health insurance providers.

She opened the file for the next appointment—another young couple having issues. Mary immediately checked to see if the PA was approved. After all, it was only fair that she be appropriately reimbursed for her time. She noted that not only had it been approved, but the provider was one she didn't mind dealing with. Her eyes scanned the forms the couple had filled out. The insurance was under the husband, David Martin. Her guess that his employer must provide better benefits was confirmed when she checked that the wife, Diana Martin, was a college professor having recently completed her doctorate.

Mary shook her head sadly. Diana fulfilled such a vital role in society and was treated a little better than someone cooking French fries at a fast food restaurant. She got up from her desk and went to welcome the Martins. Mary was confident she could get to the root of their problems and tally another successful save of a marriage.

She asked the couple to join her in the office. Not surprisingly, they sat on the

leather couch as far from one another as possible. Mary's experienced eye saw the classic body language from David. He was reluctant to be here. She grabbed a small notebook and sat opposite them. Mary looked at Diana and bade her to describe a little about herself. As usual, the young woman was more open and willing to elaborate on their issues. As Diana talked, Mary scribbled down some brief notes.

Diana:

24 years old.

College Professor, young for such a prestigious position.

Three siblings. All younger. Parents / married. Live an hour away.

Long, straight black hair.

Some Latino heritage?

More outgoing personality.

She appears physically fit but claims she doesn't like to work out.

Places importance on appearance. Organized.

Many issues. Loss of passion in love life. Lack of respect and understanding of her.

Mary found the comment about the lack of understanding interesting. David looked to be a typical Caucasian male. The surname suggested English ancestry. Mary would have thought he would be interested in learning more about his wife owing to their different cultural backgrounds.

Getting David to open up was more difficult. She had to ask more direct questions.

David:

24 years old.

Engineer.

1 Sibling / younger. Parents / divorced. Live in the city.

Short brown hair.

Well groomed. Is it necessary for his job as a manager at a manufacturing facility?

Reserved personality. Unrelated to the counseling session.

Physically fit. He claims he works out every day.

He doesn't understand why Diana is mad at him. He hates being here.

Every couple Mary had ever worked with was unique, but David and Diana shared many similarities. She looked at David.

"So you contend you're happy with your love life?" she asked pointedly.

He squirmed with the directness of the question.

"Well, yeah. We make love a couple of times a week," he said sheepishly.

On the other end of the couch, Diana glared at him with both arms folded across her chest. Mary didn't need a college degree to tell Diana was of a different mind on this subject.

"You may call it love, but I feel like I'm a piece of meat," she spat out venomously.

Mary furiously scribbled notes as the two started bickering. At least they were talking now.

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After the session, David and Diana returned to the one-bedroom apartment they rented. The atmosphere in their car could be aptly described as chilly, and the air conditioning wasn't even on. He gripped the steering while wondering why he had even agreed to see a counselor as Diana wanted—the last hour only seemed to open old wounds instead of helping their marriage.

As soon as they arrived home, Diana headed to the bedroom and slammed the door shut. David rubbed his back in anticipation of another uncomfortable night asleep on the couch. He dearly loved Diana but felt completely lost for what to do. His engineering background gave him the skills to fix many things but no insight into how to repair his marriage.

He turned the TV on but barely watched whatever was on the sports channel. His stomach's loud growling finally alerted him that he hadn't eaten in hours.

*'A bowl of cereal it is. Good old bachelor chow,'* he thought sadly.

He didn't even bother to sit down while eating. He stared mindlessly at the kitchen cabinets, munching on the wheat flakes, when Diana appeared in the entry to the kitchen. Her demeanor had softened since they arrived home.

"Dinner of Champions, I see," she joked.

David felt his spirits lift. At least she wasn't mad at him at for the moment. He recalled her complaint at the counseling session regarding his lack of help at home.

"Can I interest you in tonight's special?"

A trace of a smile creased her lips, "And what would that be?"

"Wheat flakes au lait," he deadpanned.

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Diana stifled a laugh. She didn't want him to think he could joke his way out of their problems. Still, there was an impish quality in him that she loved. Diana wrapped her arms around his waist and hugged him.

"You don't have to sleep on the couch. But I'm exhausted," she alerted him. "The kids at school were an extra handful today."

He nodded solemnly. There would be no post-argument sex tonight.

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As Diana prepared for bed, David went to brush his teeth. People always said she was such a good influence on him. Personal hygiene was undoubtedly one of those aspects. Once they got decent jobs after college, Diana insisted they obtain prescriptions for the new YourEssence pills. He had been skeptical about the need and the co-pay costs. Both were still working off college debt and saving to buy a home. He also wondered why 20-something adults had any need for these pills.

However, their doctor pointed out that the human body generates 100 million new cells daily by cell division. Even if the process was 99.999% accurate, that still left the possibility that 10,000 cells might develop the first genetic steps toward becoming cancerous. The company that marketed YourEssence heavily promoted its pill's ability to correct any errors that might develop over time.

With his focus divided between his teeth and his marriage, he absentmindedly reached into the cabinet to grab his pill bottle. He barely glanced at it to confirm who its contents were intended for. Seeing "Martin, D." was enough information, so he popped the cap off and swallowed one pill. He thrust the bottle back on the shelf in what he thought was the proper place.

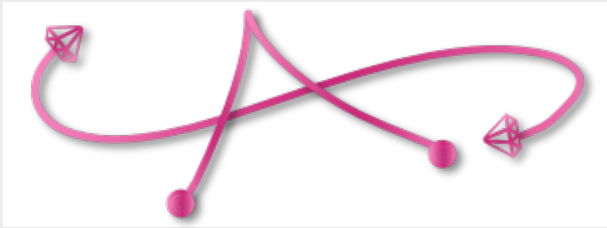
He made two mistakes. The first was the bottle he opened for "Martin, Diana." The second was when he went to place it on the right side of the cabinet, and he inadvertently moved his prescription to the left.

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Their apartment bathroom was only large enough for one person at a time. After David returned to the bedroom, Diana took her turn. Today's events had left her both physically and mentally exhausted, so she might be forgiven for not scrutinizing the label of her YourEssence bottle closely. Diana had kept the bathroom tidy, and her bottle was in the spot it had always been in. Thus, she dutifully swallowed a pill and brushed her teeth.

The two quickly fell asleep with Diana nestled in David's arms.

As the hours crept by, their bodies began to change.



### **Chapter 3 - A Startling Start**

"Holy shit!" An extremely shocked feminine voice rang out in the Martin family's bedroom.

"What's going on?" An equally confused masculine voice said softly. The lights in the room were out, but there was no mistaking that these voices originated from the wrong places.

"I've got boobs! Why do I have boobs! And why do I sound like this? Wake up, Diana! Something's very wrong."

Diana sat up and realized immediately what had happened, but she was determined to let calmer heads prevail. "Just hang on, David. You're having a panic attack."

"You're damn right. I'm panicking," David said in a voice that perfectly reproduces his wife's. The dots were not connecting as fast for David. "It must have been aliens. They transplanted my brain into a woman's body."

"Which woman's body?" Diana said calmly and in a deep baritone voice that should have been enough to snap David out of his fantastical thinking.

"How should I know? I can't see anything."

"But you can hear my voice, right?" Diana asked with a whimsical lilt as he ended her question. This seemed to stop David right in his tracks. "You sound kind of like me... why? But... oh no!" David's mind finally connected the dots and was not happy with the situation he found himself in.

"We mixed up our doses. Didn't we?" David asked.

"I'm going with most definitely," Diana responded.

"This is not good."

"That's the understatement of the century. Did you think I was hoping to wake up a dude?"

"No, not that... I mean, yeah, that's a problem, but it's more than that."

"What is it?" Diana asked as she scooted closer to David, who was now sitting on the edge of the side of their bed.

"Today is my client presentation prep meeting. If I don't go, we won't be ready for our meeting on Friday."

"So? Have someone on your team handle it. I think we're both staying home today."

"That's just it; I was told under no uncertain terms that I was responsible for the preparation. I could get fired over this."

"Shit"

"Yeah, shit. You're going to have to go in and pretend to be me until this shit wears off," David said, having stood up and turned around to face Diana. Seeing Diana in his body caused a stir of emotion, and he started to cry from the shock and frustration.

"There there," Diana said, trying to calm David. She stood up and went over to hug David. "We will figure it out. We still have plenty of time this morning to figure things out." As Diana leaned in to give a hug, she neglected to notice her morning erection was tenting her pants. Unfamiliar with the need to angle her body, she ran her member directly into the stomach of her now much shorter husband. The shock sent both parties flying back.

"What's the deal?" David yelled out.

"Sorry, sorry. I didn't realize that was there. I'm not the one who usually wakes up with a hard-on, you know," Diana said as she turned to reposition herself back on the side of the bed.

David's tears resumed. Not having his body was disruptive, and hearing his wife complain about it was further ammunition for his emotions to latch on to. The tears and frustration only seemed to build as he stood there, so he decided to excuse

himself to their en-suite bathroom.

Diana, on the other hand, was experiencing the impact of high testosterone flowing through her. She could feel the hard-on in her pants more acutely now that she was made aware of it, and just as the experience of his new body overtook David, so too was Diana. Only in Diana's case, it was an insatiable urge to do something about her erection. A light touch surprised Diana at the overall sensitivity of her husband's penis. That touch took little time in sending the follow-up signals to Diana's brain that once was not enough. Sticking her hand down her pajama bottoms, Diana grasped the girth of her husband's dick and was off to the races. Her hand stroked up and down feverishly to rid her of this feeling of sexual tension. Her brain and body were in sync to reaffirm Diana's choice to masturbate.

It didn't take long, a few moments of swift stroking, and Diana was on the verge of her first orgasm as a male. Just as she felt that lunge, a momentary contraction before the release, David returned to the bedroom. "What are you doing?" He asked in sheer disbelief. "That's my body! You shouldn't be doing that."

It was too late, in any case. Diana's cum shot out and startled David, who decided to leave the room on the spot.

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David sat at the kitchen table with his head in his hands. It had been twenty minutes or more since he had caught his wife stroking his meat. "Didn't she say she felt like I was using her like a piece of meat? Well, now she's used me! I can't believe this," David thought to himself as he continued to pout in the kitchen.

"How do I look?"

David looked up and saw that Diana had showered and dressed for a day at the office.

"You look like I should."

"Well, besides that. Do I look the part well enough to fool your coworkers?"

David stopped pouting long enough to offer an earnest answer. "Yeah, you look the part. Are you going to be able to handle the meeting, though?"

"Well, it's not like we have many choices here. I heard what you said about it, and look, I know I messed up back in the room. I want to make it up to you so that I can handle this. I called the school and told them you won't be in today. So you should take the day off and relax. I know that a woman's emotions can be a lot to handle.



I've had a whole lifetime to get used to it, so you should try and keep things steady, and then maybe if you're up for it, we can go out to dinner together tonight?"

"Go out like this? Are you serious?"

"Yeah, I know it's a lot, but it's also a unique perspective for each other to gain. I can hear Dr. Simms' voice now, 'What better way to walk a mile in each other's shoes?'"

"You think this will help with our relationship?"

"Well, I can assure you that my little debacle this morning gave me a better understanding of you."

"That's great. So I'm just a meathead who needs to get his jollies?"

"No, but I understand the male sexual urges a little better as a result of what I experienced. That's not nothing."

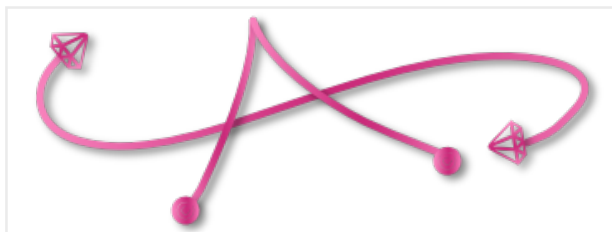
"So you want me to do the same?" David said back with a bite to his words.

"Nothing of the sort; I just think it's good to try to appreciate each other's perspectives better, which presents a unique opportunity. Plus, the pills should only last through the night so that we will be back to normal by morning. So what harm is there in trying something new?"

"I guess... I'm still pretty repulsed by this whole experience."

"Try it for me. We can learn so much in the next 16 hours. Trust me"

"All right. I'll trust you."



#### **Chapter 4 - Diana Saves the Day**

Diana stepped into David's office building and immediately felt the pressure to perform weigh on her shoulders. This would be a make-or-break situation for

David's career, and Diana must be masterful in her impression of David. She looked the part just fine. Now, all she had to do was give the acting performance of her life. "David! Good, you're here. I was getting worried that you might be late. We've got to get these slides under control. The whole presentation is a mess, and Tom is unhappy. He told me that we either fix it or we don't come back tomorrow," a worried man said as he grabbed Diana's wrist and pulled him into a meeting room.

Diana stared intently at the man's face. So hard she could barely think of anything else. The faintest glimmer of thought manifested, and Diana said, "OK, calm down, Brian. We're going to handle it." Brian looked back at Diana, and his whole demeanor changed. "Oh shit, I got his name wrong," Diana worried momentarily. "Thank goodness you're here today. I couldn't do this without you, man. You're my savior," Brian said as he released the tension from his body. "Thank goodness, I almost blew it right away," Diana thought, grateful that she remembered David's coworker's name. She tried to remember when she had met Brian to be able to recall his name, but the memory of their meeting eluded her. "Huh, must have been a long time ago, I guess," her thoughts lingered momentarily before diving into the challenge.

The pair worked straight through lunch, ordering and then reordering slides. They took notes about who would present what parts and what they would say. Diana brought her unique and fresh perspective to the presentation and ended up changing significant portions of the slides to have them make more sense to a broader audience. Brian was in awe. Each suggestion led to more easily digestible content. Brian kept bringing in more colleagues to test the slides, and everyone was impressed with how the slides easily conveyed complex topics. One man said they had also never truly understood a product until they saw Diana's slide.

Diana was on cloud nine. People were respecting her opinion immediately. The things she said were accepted as though she was the authority on the subject. Her experience at the school she worked at was the polar opposite. Her gruff, stuffy old department head routinely dismissed her suggestions for improving results at the university. Now, she was genuinely feeling empowered for the first time. Not just empowered. She felt powerful. The combination of her male body, the testosterone, the adrenaline, and the experiences she had encountered preparing this presentation were all combined to make her feel the best she had ever felt in her entire life.

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Back at the house, David was tenuously going through the day. He had dressed in some of Diana's clothes but nothing too feminine. He couldn't stand the idea of wearing something frilly or with lace. So he put on the pair of pants he found in the

closet and a shirt that Diana had bought on a vacation. It was just a cotton shirt, nothing special about it, but David couldn't help but be annoyed that it clung to his body so much. He had closed his eyes, putting panties on. He completely ignored the fact that he should wear a bra.

David found a spot on the couch and decided to watch daytime television to pass the hours until this misery could end. David had never been a fan of soap operas; there was too much drama, or maybe it was melodrama. He could never get those straight. The episode for the day was about a long-lost lover being reunited with his partner. David laughed at first at the absurdity of someone being gone for a year without any trace. David felt his feelings soften as the man recounted what had happened to him. The poor man had been kidnapped by a rival for the woman's affection. The rival knew he had lost but was so desperate that he sent the man away to a remote island. The man had to scavenge, forage, and fight to survive. He told her the thought of returning to her was the only thing keeping him alive. David felt a tear form as the man recounted this point.

David found that he was getting engrossed in the story now. So much so that he hadn't realized that he was now sitting on the couch with his legs curled up next to him. He had seen Diana do the same when she watched something she was enjoying. On realizing he was unconsciously acting like Diana, he promptly stretched his legs back out in front of him so he was sitting on the couch regularly. "How did I end up like that?" He wondered to himself.

Around lunchtime, David set to the task of making something to eat. Looking through the fridge, he started reaching for some leftovers from a meal earlier in the week. "Too heavy; I don't want to feel all bloated later," a stray thought sparked in his mind. "Huh? Why would I worry about that?" David was confused by the seemingly errant thought. As he tried to pull the leftovers out of the fridge, again, he felt another compulsion just to put the food back and have a salad instead. "It will be easier, and you'll feel better later," another thought appeared seemingly out of nowhere.

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Diana returned home at the end of the day feeling triumphant. "I'm home! Also, you're the hero of the office. The presentation was amazing, and everyone was fully on board!"

David walked out of the bedroom to greet his wife. "That's great, Diana. I'm so glad things worked out. Hopefully, Brian took the lead enough so you weren't overburdened."

"Brian helped, but it was mostly me, to be honest. I just found a groove and got

the job done! I was on fire!"

"Oh... well, that's good then. I'm glad you had a good day," David said, but his posture betrayed his feelings. He demurred as he seemed even more uncomfortable by the role reversal that had inadvertently occurred.

"Don't be sour, David. This is something to celebrate! I bet you'll get a promotion if this presentation goes as well as people said. We should celebrate! Come on, go throw a dress on, and we'll dance and drink and have a great time until this whole situation ends."

"A dress? Really? I don't want to be seen out wearing a dress. I'm a guy."

"Not today, you aren't. Everyone will see you as a 100% girl. Come on, trust me. You'll find it liberating. I promise."

"I don't know."

"Please... for me?" Diana drew out her words to emphasize how much it meant to her.

"All right, but nothing too short. I don't want a bunch of guys staring at me all night."

Diana helped David get into a dress that required a strapless bra to help compliment his dress. David was just glad it wasn't digging into his shoulders. Looking at himself in the mirror, he couldn't believe how nice he looked and felt. Though, he did rationalize these points by thinking it was "how nice his wife looked." His memories of his wife wearing this same dress were helping to ground him in the role play.

"Let me put a little mascara on here for you," Diana said, moving the pen straight into David's face.

"Hey, what's the deal?"

"We've got to complete the look. Don't be a baby. You'll look great."

"Ugh, fine. Just be quick about it."

Diana applied the mascara, dusted David's cheeks with blush, and then helped him apply lipstick to finish the look.

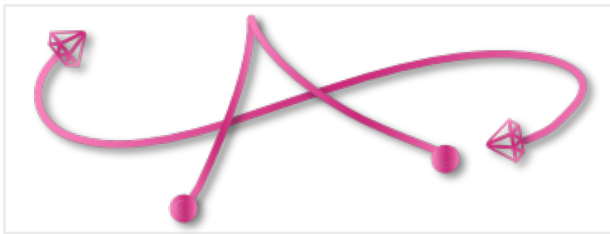
"There, you look perfect. If you play your cards right, maybe you'll get lucky

tonight," Diana said, teasing David.

"I cannot express to you how impossible that is. I'm a guy, Diana. I'm not going to get 'lucky' as a girl. It's never going to happen. Period."

"All right, all right. I was teasing. You've been a good sport. We're good to get dinner now. I'll tell you all about my day, and if we feel up for it, we can dance a bit and then come home. By the time we're in bed, the changes will start to reverse, and we can put this day all behind us."

"Thank you, that sounds good."



## **Chapter 5 - Dinner, Dancing, Dare They?**

Sitting at the restaurant, David could feel every eye in the building. Or at least he thought that he could. His nerves were tingling, and his anxiety was through the roof. Diana sat in the booth beside David and placed her hand on his thigh. "It's all right; take a deep breath," Diana said in that tone David would use to convey confidence. "Thanks, that's reassuring. It's like everyone's staring... Hey! Wait just a minute. No fair using that tone with me like this!"

"What do you mean? This tone..." Diana said, adopting a velvety smooth and gentle tone to her voice.

"Yes, that one," David replied as he felt the words travel through his body. "That works too well."

"Now you get to see how I feel when you do that to me. Turn around's fair play, you know," Diana said with a grin. David's frustration was amplified by the fact that the face he was looking at was supposed to be his. As the couple continued their conversation, the waiter approached the table, offering a complimentary glass of wine.

"Sure! We'll each have one. Thank you!" Diana was quick to respond to David. As the waiter poured the glasses of wine, David stared right at Diana, indicating he was not looking to drink tonight. The waiter excused himself, and David jumped right into his complaint.

"I don't want to drink tonight. I have had a rough enough day as it's been. I don't need a hangover to top it all off. You know wine gives me a headache."

"It doesn't give me one, though, and you are in my body now, so why not take the edge off a bit? You said it yourself; the day was tough enough as it was. Have a couple of glasses of wine. Eat some great food, and just let go! Besides, we should be celebrating. 'You' had an amazing day at the office today!"

David relented and took a sip of the wine. To his shock, he did enjoy the taste. Usually, the flavor of any wine just reminded him of how likely he was to have a headache later. The couple sipped their glasses of wine while they looked over the menus. David was hoping to get something hearty and filling. He had gone with the simple salad for lunch, and now his hunger was peaking. Diana seemed to have the same idea as she pointed at the menu's most expensive steak option. "I think I'll have this one tonight," she said with gusto. "That's what I was thinking, too," David replied.

"Don't forget, my body can't quite take that much food. You need to think a bit smaller, maybe a filet instead?"

David relented. He saw he had to agree with his wife's judgment. After settling their meal choices, the waiter took the couple's order. "Do they have to keep calling me ma'am? It's making me cringe," David whispered to Diana.

"What do you expect him to call you? You're playing the part of me tonight. I would be aghast if they called me anything else."

"Yeah... I guess it's not the role I expected to play."

The couple continued recounting their respective day with each other. The details of David's updated presentation were of particular interest, given the dramatic changes that Diana had made with Brian. David listened intently as Diana recounted the events of the day and the decisions she had made. He knew he needed to get as much of the information from Diana as possible so he could pick up his work in the morning. The content was flowing smoothly, and so was the wine. David and Diana finished their first glasses of wine while chatting and waiting for their meals to arrive. Diana was glad that David had finally stopped scanning the room every thirty seconds, looking for some threat that was never coming.

The couple's meals arrived, and Diana ordered another glass of wine for each. As they ate their meals, David was glad that Diana had suggested the more meager cut of steak. He could only make his way through about half of the steak before he

felt his hunger diminished. So, feeling content with his meal and with the information dump from Diana, David let himself relax for the first time in the evening. Looking at Diana sitting in his body, David felt a stirring deep inside that he was unfamiliar with. He tried to shake himself off this sensation, but then Diana looked up and smiled at him. The wonder David felt only amplified at this sight.

Additionally, his mind was making connections that he was not expecting. David felt that being closer to this person would feel good. He again questioned these thoughts but found his mind clouded by the effects of the wine he had consumed. As these thoughts continued to linger, David felt it increasingly necessary to act on them. So, as casually as he could manage, he moved closer and closer to Diana in the booth.

Diana noticed that David was moving closer to her and that David seemed to be roaming his eyes over her body. Diana was glad to see David was finally giving in to the moment. So, with David sitting beside her, she placed a hand down on David's upper thigh. Diana gave a gentle but firm squeeze with her hand, which sent a shock through David's body. He was startled momentarily but collected himself and then leaned against Diana. Diana moved her hand to be wrapped around David's back instead, holding him close to her body. David responded by burying her face against Diana's shoulder.

David was awash with a flood of new sensations. The thigh squeeze had surprised him but also felt good. Surprisingly so. Being held close to Diana's, formerly his, body made David feel safe and secure in a way he had never felt before. His current body's smaller size is highlighted by how well he fits into this position next to Diana. His feelings were jumbled up, a mixture of concern and also contentment. David's confusion didn't stop him from getting up with Diana when she suggested they dance.

David felt the effects of the alcohol acutely when he stood up. His body was slightly stumbling as David felt his balance fluctuate unexpectedly. Diana caught David helping him to stand up. Once settled, they went to the dance floor, and Diana took the lead. The songs were slow, so David could mostly lean against Diana's larger body. David felt like a fish out of water being held so femininely. Diana's hand was placed behind his back, just above his ass. It made David aware of the curves his body possessed in a much more immediate manner. The foreign feeling only lasted a few moments, though, as David found the swaying motion of the dancing to be calming. He soon had placed his face against Diana's chest, and the two were dancing like any other lovers would.

Diana felt cheeky by the third song and moved her hand lower on David's back. It was now resting on the upper curve of his backside rather than the square of his lower back. David had noticed, his mind lighting up again as new sensations

flowed through him. "Is she trying to feel me up? Why does it feel so good? What should I do about it?" David's thoughts raced. As he was about to reach back and move Diana's hand, the song concluded, and Diana held David firmly as she dipped him down. The rush of being dipped down redirected all of David's attention. Being stood back up, Diana leaned in and placed a kiss squarely on David's lips. David was being pushed further and further outside his comfort zone. He wanted to pull away and end the kiss, but he also felt something new. A pleasure that was building inside. It felt like a fluttering sensation deep down in his body. Like he was light as a feather and found himself adrift on a breeze on a sunny day. As Diana broke the kiss, David opened his eyes. "Did I just close my eyes when Diana kissed me?" His thoughts bounced around as he processed all the stimuli of the night.

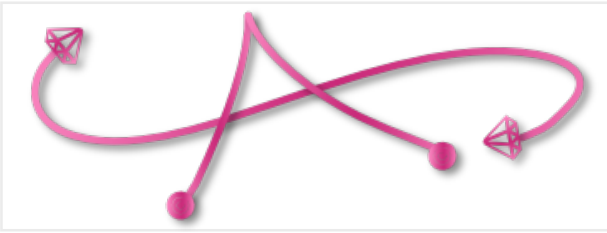
David was led off the dance floor and into a cab. The effects of the alcohol had thoroughly dulled his senses. He felt glad that Diana was seemingly all right. He felt safe with his wife. He was delighted he was with a 'man' to protect him. He felt particularly vulnerable at the moment. Sitting down in the back of the cab, Diana scooted beside him. "That was fun; I'm glad we went," David said, touching Diana's thigh. "I'm glad you had a good time. You deserved to be taken out and to have some fun after the day you had," Diana said back. "You're so right! Today was too weird," David's mind was overwhelmed by competing thoughts. Thoughts about his current body, how it felt, and how it responded to being near his former body. All these thoughts conflicted with his feelings of discomfort at being in a woman's body. "I'm a man, damn it, but this all feels so nice right now."

David's hand moved up and down along Diana's leg. With each pass, David's hand edged ever closer to Diana's crotch. "Diana... we don't have to," Diana said to David. "Shhh," David responded with a finger to his mouth as he continued moving his hand until finally he came into contact with Diana's erection. David leaned in and planted a kiss on Diana's lips as his hand continued to grip her erection. Diana wrapped her arms around David, embracing him fully. Diana's hands, no longer restricted by the public's eye, wandered all over David's backside. David felt and enjoyed the gropes of his ass as the two lovers kissed passionately.

"You can let us out here, thanks," Diana broke the kiss and directed her command to the driver. Being let out of the cab, Diana further surprised David by lifting him off his feet. Now being carried in Diana's arms, David wrapped his arms around Diana's neck and pulled himself in to kiss Diana as she brought him to their front door. "You going to carry me over the threshold?" David asked jokingly, his mind still awash with alcohol. The thought of being the 'bride' is humorous to him now.

"You know it, babe," Diana replied as she did just that. Carrying David in, Diana placed David down gently on their couch. Leaning in, Diana...





## Chapter 6 - David Does What?

Diana's lips pressed lightly, at first, against David's. Seeing that David didn't immediately recoil, Diana asserted herself more and kissed David more deeply. The two stayed together, kissing while David moved his hands across Diana's back. David noted the muscles and the tone of Diana's back. However, he had to acknowledge that it was his own back that he was appreciating. Running his hands further down Diana's backside, he felt the energy and passion of their make-out session building inside. If he was going to go through with this, his alcohol-impacted mind figured he might as well get the whole picture. Adding to this, his current female body was doing its part, sending all sorts of confusing but pleasurable sensations to David's brain. David acknowledged that Diana's body was attracted to David's body. There was no denying that fact. David was feeling way too much sexual passion to think otherwise.

David had to decide if he was going to listen to that passion or instead listen to the part of his mind that was still very much male and very much a heterosexual male. While David was thinking of this, Diana lifted David from the couch. Now, back in his wife's arms, he could see that Diana wanted to move things to the bedroom. However, Diana's pausing made it clear that she was waiting for confirmation that David wanted to continue. This was it, the moment of truth for David. Looking his wife in the eyes, he leaned in and resumed kissing her, signaling his consent.

Once again placed on his bed, David worked quickly to disrobe. Diana did the same. David struggled more than Diana in this task, and she assisted David as she finished much more quickly. "It's easier for guys," David said as he struggled to get out of his bra. "Here, let me give you a hand," Diana positioned herself over David's body and reached around his back to help with the bra clasp. In an instant, the bra loosened, and David removed the clothing from his arms and chest. Without missing a beat, Diana resumed kissing David, first on the lips but then migrating to his neck, then shoulders, and then further down. David tried to prepare himself for what was coming. Diana was working her way ever closer to his breasts. David had not explored his wife's body during the day. The thought of doing so felt like a violation. Whatever was coming was going to be a surprise. He had heard women complain that their nipples were sensitive, but he had no frame of reference.

A couple of kisses placed delicately at the crest of David's breast sent tingles of excitement. His breasts were so foreign and previously forbidden. If anyone would be allowed to touch them, Diana was the person who would be. David relaxed at this thought, but the reprieve was short-lived. Diana's tongue flicked against David's erect nipple. The sudden jolt sent a massive explosion of sensations to David's brain, and he felt it reverberating through his body. "What the?" His words came out, but Diana stopped him. "Let me show you how to get this body going," Diana said as she sent a hand down to David's sex.

Diana traced around David's nipples with her fingers or tongue interchangeably as she whispered gentle affirmations to David. David was soon moaning in ecstasy as he felt a combination of nipple stimulation, tweaking, and teasing, all combined with what Diana had initiated down below. Diana started similarly slow, working her fingers along David's vulva. Tracing around the perimeter, she could feel how David's sex was swollen with blood from his obvious pleasure. Working to build David up, Diana mixed pressure and light touch to increase the enjoyment of his temporary sex. Diana took note when she eventually felt David become wet from stimulation.

"Should we move things forward?" Diana asked David. It was clear what Diana meant. This was the last chance to avoid the outcome that David was on track for. David was either going to agree to let a penis enter his body, or he would need to stop it now. Diana had been too good, however. If just touch, kisses, and the occasional breath running over this body felt like this, then David could only imagine how good being fucked would feel. Or at least that's what his male mind wanted to believe.

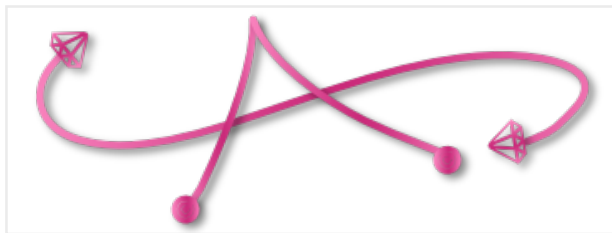
"Yeah... Yeah, go ahead."

With that, Diana pressed the tip of her penis against David's outer lips. She didn't enter him right away, first taking a moment to tease his entrance with the end of her penis. "Do it! Put it in!" David practically howled. His sexual energy had built to a crescendo. Diana did as directed. She felt her own body quiver a bit as the tip went in, and she felt how tightly David was squeezing her dick. "Oh, it's so sensitive," Diana remarked. "Uh huh," David was not listening or in a mood to discuss the differences in sensations between the sexes. Diana did her best to establish a pace that she could tolerate, which would be enjoyable for David. She thought about how few men understood the importance of pacing. She finally understood why so many men just wanted to pound their partner's sex, however. It felt good to thrust her hips and to have the head of her penis smash up against the insides of a vagina.

Diana decided to lean into the more male instincts she was feeling as she got a

rhythm going. She reached about and aggressively squeezed David's breasts. A more primal roughness now replaces the former gentleness. David didn't seem to mind, in any case. When Diana took her hands off his breasts and grabbed his hips, David took his own hands and resumed squeezing his breasts. He started tugging on his nipples, too, before he dialed that back, obviously realizing that he was being too rough with himself.

Diana, now holding David's lower body up off the bed, was thrusting deeply into David and using her leverage from the added use of her hands on David's hips to plunge herself into David as deeply and powerfully as possible. "I'm cumming! Oh God, I feel it everywhere!" David yelled at the top of his lungs. Diana could feel David's muscles contracting on her dick. The added pressure was too much, and Diana thrust one last time into David before her orgasm erupted. The concentration of the pleasure sitting entirely in her groin. It felt like a massive firework, the likes of which she had never felt. Diana practically collapsed from the shock of it. She was lying now on top of David. The couple embraced as they drifted off to sleep.



## **Chapter 7 - David Struggles**

When waking up in the morning, David was beyond excited to return to his original body. The curves of his wife had been excellent for an evening of lovemaking, but that was the last time he wanted to have them himself. Diana didn't leap out of bed in excitement like David had. That said, she was content to be back to her usual self. The married couple resumed their standard routines, preparing for their jobs like nothing had happened. Diana tried to probe a few times with David if he had enjoyed himself last night, but he just gave a quick response that he had but that he was glad to be back in his body. From Diana's perspective, she was feeling a tremendous increase in her connection with David. She understood his feelings and his behavior from the last few months so much more deeply. Being a man had been eye-opening.

Diana kept looking to see if she could detect any signs of change in her husband. Did he understand her better now? Would he be more thoughtful as a partner and as a lover? Would he value things differently now? It was a rushed morning, so there weren't many opportunities to pry and go deep like she wanted to, but she wanted to give David the benefit of the doubt. Being a man had been intoxicating,

the power, the strength, the dominance. So Diana could understand that David might be experiencing a bit of a high being back in his male body. She was willing to wait until the evening to dig in further and see if their accident had created a similar empathy in her husband as it had in her.

With barely a peck on the cheek, David rushed out the door to the office. Diana took her time finishing getting ready to return to her classroom. Being a professor had always been a rewarding experience for her, so she could at least look forward to that. However, she had to admit she was jealous of David getting to return to the high-energy, high-risk office environment. It had been a rush dealing with problems and coordinating across a large group. She had felt so mature, so confident, so in control. Teaching at university offered many valuable feelings, but it fostered none of those feelings she had experienced as David.

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David returned late from the office. Diana had already been home for over an hour. The two were usually home around the same time.

"Late day at the office. Everything ok? Brad didn't give you a hard time about the collaboration tax slide, did he? I told him it was handled, and he needed to let it go..."

"No..." David came in, and his voice sounded dejected, and his posture looked like he felt defeated.

"Oh sweetie, come sit down," Diana escorted David to the dining table and removed his coat. "Tell me, what's up? Did something happen?"

"Yes, something happened. You did."

"Huh? What do you mean? I didn't do anything. I was at the university all day."

"No, yesterday, you changed the presentation so much I could barely keep up today. Everyone thought I was coming down with something since I was different today. You changed the presentation and excited everyone; I can't keep up with it now. What does 'ingenuity planning and execution' even mean?"

Diana tried to answer David's questions, but as they continued to work through the presentation, it became more apparent that David was out of his depth. "You were just too good at this. I don't think I can keep it up. I'm going to crash and burn. I'll probably be out of a job by the end of the week."

"No, I'm sure you can get it. We need to keep practicing, and I'll answer your

questions."

"No! I am not going to get it. We've been at this for hours. I'm no better off than I was when we started. I might be worse. I'm more confused than I was before!"

"Well, what should we do then? You're just going to give up?"

"Yes... I mean, no...," David said as his head hung low. He was deep in thought, but Diana assumed he was thinking of how he would lose his job. Instead, David was trying to come to terms with something extreme. Something that Diana would never have guessed. Building up the conviction to say it, he raised his head and looked his wife in the eyes. "It's a lot to ask, but... you do it. You give the presentation."

"I don't think they'd listen to a professor, David. I don't have any credibility in your sector."

"Give the presentation as me," David said again, hanging his head. His ego was deflated as he had to ask for this huge favor. "I'll lose my job if it doesn't go perfectly. The client is too valuable to the company, and I blew it today. You can save it, however. You have a PhD in cognitive psychology. You can give the presentation, and I will jump back in on the next client."

"How long would that be for?"

"Shouldn't be any more than three weeks. The presentation is in two weeks, and the final phase is closing the deal. During the last week, the account lead must clarify the proposal and contract with clients."

"And you're sure you want me to do this? You want me to 'be' you for that long?"

"It will be weird having two of me walking around, but I'll just hide out here until this all ends."

"Two of you?"

"Yeah, there's no need for me to change. I need you to look like me so you can close this deal."

"I can't be off from my job for three weeks! You will have to cover my job, but don't worry; I have a clear syllabus and schedule already planned."

"You want me to do your job?"

"Well, yeah. Is it that big a stretch to ask you to do the same for me as you are asking?"

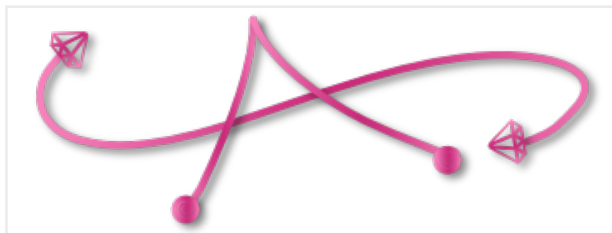
David hung his head. He knew the correct answer to the question. He didn't like it at all. He wanted to yell and get mad but knew that wouldn't improve things. "No... of course not," David responded through his gritted teeth.

"Thank you. I'm glad you agree. We should probably switch gears, then. I need to teach you a few things about my coworkers. Also, I need to get you up to speed about being a woman in a professional setting."

"Ok..." David was contrite in his response. He knew he was in for a rude awakening. He had it easy with the prior accident, getting the day off. Now, he was about to be thrust into the spotlight with a group of college-aged kids, a dozen other professors, and, heaven forbid, the student's parents.

Diana returned to the room with two pills. One in each hand. She deliberately held her left hand at an entire arm's length. She resolutely said, handing David the pill with her left hand, "Down the hatch!"

David swallowed his pride and swallowed the pill. "All right... where do we begin?"



## Chapter 8 - The Struggle Continues

David sat there patiently as he felt his body shifting. Occasionally, he would readjust his seated position as his hips continued their expansion, and his legs became uncomfortable trying to remain in their prior positions. For David, the height loss really troubled him, however. Diana was six inches shorter than he was. He tried to continue listening as his eyeline up to Diana changed. Now, hearing his wife detail her work environment in 'his' voice instead of hers, he tried to summarize what he had been told.

"Janet is sensitive to changes, so don't surprise her with anything new. I have to ensure I gradually introduce new ideas to her and give her lots of time to come to terms with them. *(I will not make any significant changes during my time as Diana.)*

"Frank is a chauvinist but takes good care of his students. So I can leave him be, but watch out for any male ego displays as they can be a mess to fall into."

"Carie is your closest work friend. She is also a huge gossip. So if I need to know something going on, I should ask her 'what's up with...!' and she will give me the latest."

"You gave me your student rosters for your classes, and I'll spend some time familiarizing myself with the names so I'm not surprised by meeting everyone. I'll watch out for Reagan and Toby, the resident 'It' couple who like to use class time to show off. Stephen is your teacher's assistant (TA) and can be counted on for any tasks I need help with."

Anything I miss?"

"I think that pretty much sums it up," Diana said to David before quickly jumping back in. "Oh, don't forget about Robert. He's the department head. He makes random stops by to observe lectures, so make sure you stick to my schedule and planner. He's a stickler for keeping the students on track, and you don't want to get pulled into his office at the end of the day. He tends to be very condescending in his feedback. He's a sweetheart if you stay on schedule, though."

"All right, watch out for Robert and ensure I stay on schedule. You have it so meticulously planned that I think I should be in good shape."

The couple wrapped up their work preparation conversation and headed to their bedroom. As David started to get into bed, Diana scolded him. "Nope, back up to the bathroom, mister, well misses. It would be best if you kept up with my evening rituals so you look good in the morning. So, get back in there. You need to apply my face cream and get changed into a nightie. I don't want to sleep next to your scratchy clothes."

"Do I have to? The YourEssence keeps you looking like this, doesn't it?"

"Sure, but I don't want to wake up with bags under my eyes. It's just different for women. You must take better proactive care of yourself, even with YourEssence in our lives."

"Ugh, fine. I'll put the lotion on, but can I please wear something else to bed? Your nighties are so... 'revealing.'"

"Yes, you have to wear my nightie. You'll like it; they are comfortable, and it's not like you haven't seen the full package anyway. You've seen it from yours and my

perspective."

"There's no winning with you, is there? Fine, I'll do everything you asked."

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David was the first to return home from work the next day. He hung his head low as he entered the apartment. He was glad when he saw that he was the first one home. He wasn't ready to deal with how Diana would take the news that he had done such a poor job with her students. As she had warned, Robert stopped by David's morning lecture, and unfortunately, he struggled to keep on track. They were halfway through the lecture's content by that point, and David was working hard to follow Diana's notes and distill them into a coherent message to deliver to the students. Robert's presence exacerbated this problem as David started to split his attention between Diana's notes and Robert's expressions of disapproval. As expected, David was called to Robert's office in the department building at the end of the day. Robert delivered the full dressing down that Diana had warned him of. David was glad that he had been warned about this. His emotions had been a mess these few days living as Diana, and the shock of being disciplined by another adult so forcefully would have sent David over the edge.

Diana walked into the apartment a half hour after David had returned home. Diana was jubilant upon her return. "Brian owes you big time, David. I saved his bacon today. Twice! You should have seen the VPs; they were eating up everything I said, and when Brian almost blew it, I swooped in with the data to back us up. I was on fire!"

"That's great, Diana. I'm glad at least one of our days went well," David said, hanging his head.

"Oh no! Babe, what happened?" Diana asked. David noticed that she had used 'his' pet name for Diana in the question. *Probably just a slip of the tongue*, he assumed before responding to Diana.

"Well, you warned me about staying on schedule..."

"Oh gosh, Robert got to you? On your first day? I'm so sorry, David. I can't believe our dumb luck."

"Yeah, he was so mean about it too!" David burst out in response as tears started to flow. He was overwhelmed by the whole experience, and his unfamiliar hormones were amplifying the way he was experiencing this grief. *Dammit, this is what I was trying not to do*. David chided himself in his thoughts.



"There, there, David. It's all going to be all right. It's happened to me before, and I'm sure it will happen again. Robert is a pig; don't lend his words any credence," Diana moved over to console and comfort David. She took him into her arms in a full-on hug from behind. David stopped what he was doing to let himself be held. It felt fitting to be wrapped in Diana's arms, especially with how he felt after the day's events.

"Babe, why don't you stop prepping dinner? We will get takeout from downstairs instead. It was a big day for us both, and we shouldn't throw extra responsibility on top of the already busy day."

*There, she repeated that pet name. Why is she calling me 'babe' when she refers to me?*

"Now that I've thought about it, I've decided. I'll run down and get our usuals. You can go throw on a pair of sweats and relax. Take your bra off; it will feel much better not to wear one anymore."

David agreed to take Diana's advice. He worried that she would insist if he disagreed with any of it. Diana released David from her embrace, turned him around, and quickly planted a quick kiss on his lips. It would have been cute, but David was the one who usually would take the initiative on little displays of affection like that. It was weird for David to be on the receiving end of it. Compounding the weirdness was that David appreciated the gesture and had gotten a little spark of joy from it.



## **Chapter 9 - Food Time For Lovers**

"All right! I'm back. One order of Moo Shu Pork and one Mapo Eggplant for me. Come and get it, David."

The couple served themselves the usual servings of their respective favorites. As David took his first bite, he noticed something off instantly. He usually loved that first bite of savory goodness mixed with a touch of sweetness, but this tasted cloyingly sweet today. He almost spit the food out on the spot, but he choked the bite of food down, swallowing and hating it the whole time.

"Does your food taste off? I think they dropped a full bag of sugar in my sauce," David asked with a grimace.

"Oh? That's not like them to make a mistake. Let me try mine..." Diana said as she took her first bite. David could see on her face that it wasn't her liking, but she dutifully swallowed her bite. "See? The food doesn't taste the same. Did they get a new chef?" David jumped straight to some justification to explain the poor quality of food.

"Wait, before we decide that they messed up the food, let me try yours," Diana said. She seemed to have some intuition about the food that David didn't.

"Here, but don't blame me when you see how bad it is," David said confidently. He was so sure his food had been prepared poorly. His memory felt infallible, so Diana's willingness to take a bite of his meal seemed ludicrous.

"I don't think you'll like what I say..."

"What?" David was incredulous. He commented on Diana's appearance, "You don't look miserable... Why don't you look miserable?"

"That's just it. It tastes fine to me. It tastes delicious. I know you're not going like this, but you should try mine."

"Why? Your eggplant always tasted so bland to me. You didn't even like it today, proving I was right about it."

"Just try it for me. Just a little, ok?"

David reluctantly agreed, but Diana could tell he wasn't looking forward to it. David's face shifted from discomfort to pleasant surprise as the small forkful of food was chewed.

"Get it now?" Diana asked David.

"Yeah, they must have a new chef. He messed up my order but finally made this eggplant have some flavor. I could eat a whole plate of this," David said while Diana shook her head.

"No, that's not it... I like the pork. You like the eggplant. Our tastes are inverted. So are our bodies. We inherited each other's tastes."

"Dammit, so now I have to eat what you like? It's bad enough having to be you at

work. I don't even act like myself at home and eat what I like," David said as he hung his head.

"Don't be so sour, David. It's not so bad to like different foods. You said it yourself: you could eat a whole plate of the eggplant. Try to relax and enjoy the meal. Now we know you will want to order what I like when we eat out. There are plenty of things we both like."

David shook his head in dismay but was scooping more eggplant onto his plate, having resigned himself to eat the meal. "I'm sorry, babe, it will be all right. It's just a short time that we have to do this." The couple ate their meal together and covered the areas that David could work on to improve his impersonation of Diana to deal with her students more effectively the next day.

As the couple lay in bed, Diana reminded David they had their second couples therapy meeting tomorrow afternoon. "Oh God, you're going to make us go to that as we are? In each other's bodies? Aren't you?" David asked, but he already knew the answer. Diana would think it's good to get the couple to explore their relationship from this perspective.

"Yes, and no alluding to who you are. I was hoping you could try and answer questions like how I would answer them. It will show if we are understanding each other better."

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Dr. Simms sat opposite the couch as the couple came in. Mary looked at their body language as they walked in and sat on the sofa. Similarly to last time, they both sat on opposite sides of the couch, but there was a marked change in the demeanor of each of them. Whereas Diana had been open and anxious last time, sitting with her body angled towards Mary and David, this time, Diana was turned away, arms crossed and looking like she was on the verge of tears. Today, David looked more open and willing to engage, but he was sympathetic to Diana's feelings. Mary noted that this reversal in disposition was quite unusual for such a short time frame.

"Diana, I can't help but notice you seem upset. I don't want to make you uncomfortable, but would you like to share what's happening? This is a safe space to share, and I'm sure David would like to help if he can. As will I."

David lowered his head. He wanted to unload. Unburden himself with someone, anyone, but he was nervous to do so in public. He might slip up and get him and Diana in trouble. Doctors don't treat YourEssence abusers kindly. Even psychiatrists are required to disclose misuse to authorities. The dangers of the

abuse of drugs were that extreme. So many billions of dollars had been stolen from unscrupulous people pretending to be others that the world uniformly acted quickly to enact laws punishing people who abused YourEssence. So, David took a deep breath and unleashed his best impression of what he thought Diana would say, given the public experiences he had been through over the last few days.

"I have had the worst week at work, Mary. It's hard to talk about because it's not anyone's fault but my own. I should be able to handle this better and... well, I might lose my job if I don't get it under control."

"Diana, I'm happy to help you talk through this, but do you think you'd like to try letting David help you? He seems ready to help, and you'll have me here to mediate."

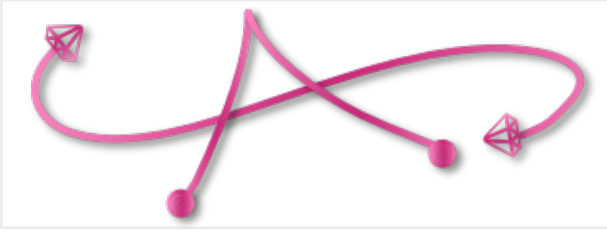
David knew that Diana would have agreed. He was nervous about doing so in front of Mary, however. David had failed to implement Diana's advice on handling his troublemaking students and got dragged back into Robert's office for the second day. David felt like Robert was targeting him for some reason, and David was paranoid that Robert could tell he wasn't the original Diana. He'd have to leave that last part out, in any case.

"Sure, Mary. 'David, I'd like your help on this...'" David recounted his experience from the day to Diana. Diana looked on, nodding and listening. At this point, David had gone on for almost ten minutes without interruption. Diana just kept letting David unload his problems and feelings. When David finished his story, Diana opened her arms to hug David. David was shocked. The simple gesture felt so affirming. So welcome. So necessary. He scooted over on the couch and let Diana embrace him. The warmth of the gesture and the feeling of the embrace sent David over the edge. His tears started flowing, and he pressed his face into Diana's shoulder. Diana kept holding David and eventually added gentle pats and back rubs. A few minutes later, David pulled himself back from Diana's shoulder and wiped some tears from his face.

"Thank you, 'David.' I... I needed that. I didn't realize how much it was bothering me."

"That's ok, 'Diana.' I want to help, and I want you to know that I'm here for you. I'll always be here for you," Diana said as David observed Mary furiously scribbling on her notepad.

A lull in the conversation opened the window for Mary to offer her insights. "David, I can tell you listened to the Diana last time. You did so much better in not dismissing her concerns. Diana, I know you had many concerns about intimacy last time. How have things been on that side?"



## Chapter 10 - David Confronts His Feelings

"Yeah... um," David was flummoxed by the question. He knew it was coming, but his feelings remained unsettled. "I thought you might ask me about that."

David looked at Diana, who had a bit of a pleading look on her face as if to say don't mess this up. David knew what was at stake, however. He had to be convincing but couldn't convey a sense of finality. He had to say there had been progress on this front, but he hoped to see continued improvements with time. He was prepared to do all of these things, but then he started to remember his night of drunken sex with Diana. The way he had felt in Diana's arms had felt so right at the moment, but it was a confusing experience for David. Guys aren't supposed to feel like that. He was supposed to be the man. He was supposed to take charge and be assertive. Why had he enjoyed being so submissive? Was that how Diana felt when they had sex?

Further, was David actually in the wrong here? Diana had made him feel so special in those moments as they made passionate love. Had he been overly dismissive of Diana's needs, and was he indeed at fault for the tension in his marriage with Diana? Reconciling these feelings on the spot would be difficult, but David thought it best to stay to the planned response.

"So, I'm not sure where to start. We have made some progress since last time. Well, we..." David paused as soon as he started. He felt guilt from trying to carry through with his planned response. On top of his confused feelings about his time with Diana, he also had to consider that he had recently been failing at his job. If that wasn't enough, he also failed at Diana's job. He didn't want to be so bad at teaching, but Diana had such specialized knowledge that she used in her lessons. He had tried to emulate Diana these last few days, resulting in more conflict, failure, and emotional outbursts. David could be truthful about all that or toe the line. He knew he had to show some vulnerability, but if he unloaded his true feelings, then they might never leave the counseling session—at least not as free individuals.

"Go ahead, Diana, we're all adults here, and this is a zero-judgment space. Everything you say here is confidential between us," Dr. Simms reassured the

nervous 'woman' sitting on her couch. David took this opportunity to come to a fast realization about his night of lovemaking with Diana. Something he thought might work.

"Well, Dr. Simms, we found a way to be intimate again. It was fairly special, too. It was almost like we were seeing each other for the first time, feeling each other for the first time, and loving each other for the first time. It felt special in a way our lovemaking hasn't felt in a long time. I'm hopeful that this trend will continue, and we will see more improvements in the future, too," David said confidently, saying that he had hit the critical notes. He hoped Diana would hear his sincerity in sharing his true feelings on the subject.

"That sounds wonderful, Diana; why were you so hesitant to share that?"

Diana looked at David with a more serious look of concern, but David just conveyed a sense of calm back as he replied, "Well, I think **\*I\*** came to a realization when we were having sex. I knew I wanted more intimacy in my life, but I guess I didn't realize another important fact. Something that changed how I was feeling. It opened my eyes to David in a whole new light, and I gained a whole new appreciation," David said, alluding to the peculiar circumstances that had led to their night of sex, hoping it would be enough to appease Dr. Simms.

"Diana, you're avoiding the central question. Why were you so hesitant?"

David's gambit had failed. Dr. Simms would not accept a roundabout explanation with no apparent meaning behind it. Diana's face looked redder by the minute as she could barely contain the nervousness caused by David going off script. "Ok. You're right. I'm avoiding saying what I'm feeling because it makes me feel frustrated with **\*myself\***. I realized that 'David' wasn't entirely to blame for my frustrations," at this point, David looked deeply into Diana's eyes, and the two connected in a way that only married couples can. From this, Diana understood that David was now speaking **\*his\*** truth and not playing at being Diana.

"That's good, Diana, go on," Dr. Simms cajoled David.

"My **\*husband\*** was dismissive of my feelings in saying we were fine because we made love a couple of times a week, which made me mad. I should have considered things from **\*his\*** perspective like I hoped he would consider things from **\*my\*** perspective. I could have seen this coming; we were falling into a dull and repetitive routine. I could have stepped back from my work and offered more support. I could have been more present when we did spend time together, like how 'David' was with me when we made love the other night. I've never felt as vulnerable but also as safe and protected as I did in his arms that night," David said, now holding Diana's hands as they continued to look each other in the eyes.

Diana wiped a tear from her face as David concluded his explanation. Dr. Simms sat there taking notes, and the couple noticed how much she was writing.

David didn't want to raise suspicions, so he had one last thing he needed to say, "So, I'm willing to admit that I was a bit harsh when I said 'David' treated me like a piece of meat, but if he keeps up his recent behavior and treats me like he did this last week consistently, then I think we're on the right track."

"Fascinating, Diana. You are using some role reversal here to see things from David's perspective. That can be healthy if we're not using it to dismiss our feelings in favor of an easy peace. David, what do you have to say about your intimacy since our last visit?"

"Well, I agree with 'Diana.' I was dismissive of her feelings, and I'm sorry for not being a better listener. 'Diana' is right, though; when we made love, it was like experiencing it for the first time again because I could see her as a **\*new woman\***. My eyes were opened to the pain I had caused 'Diana,' and that helped me be a better and more attentive lover. I'm sorry. I am such a lug head that it took me so long to realize my mistakes."

David recoiled a bit at the cheap shot Diana had taken at the end there. He had taken some liberties, too, so he would let them slide.

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"You said some pretty surprising things in there," Diana said to David as they got into their car. Diana had taken the driver's seat as had become a habit in their new bodies.

"Yeah, a whole flood of emotions and feelings welled up in me right as I was about to say what we had practiced. I realized that even though I'm a guy, and I'm not supposed to have enjoyed being the submissive one, I did enjoy it, and that was because of how you treated me. That opened my eyes to the fact that you were right and I was wrong. I should have treated you with the same love and attention you showed me that night. All that said, I was pretty drunk though, so no getting any ideas about what I like and want in the future when it comes to sex."

"Right... of course, we were both pretty drunk that night. No worries from my side," Diana said, but her thoughts were not as happy to acquiesce to this point. Sex with David had been a pinnacle for her. Yes, she had taken the time to demonstrate her expectations for how David should treat her, but she never expected to have found so much pleasure from being the one to take the lead. She loved the power, the control, the dominance. She secretly yearned to do it again and wanted to feel that way many more times.

"Thanks for understanding, Diana. You think Dr. Simms bought it, though?" David asked, oblivious to Diana's inner thoughts.

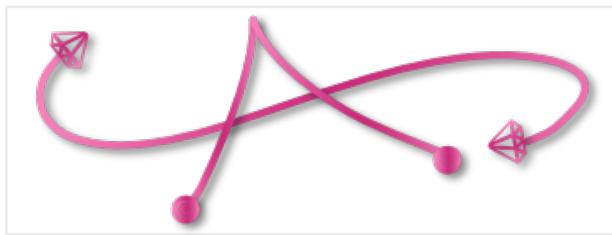
"Yeah, I think so. She saw we were both giving some ground. You almost gave too much but saved it at the end."

David wiped his brow to indicate relief, "That's why I said that. I wanted you to know how I was feeling, in any case. I understand your perspective a lot better after the week I've had. I don't think anything has gone as expected, and it's revealed how hard life can be as a woman."

"Thank you, David. I can see that you understand my perspective better. It's a relief to me. I hope the lessons stick. We will be switching back soon, and I don't want us to lose the progress we're making."

"Yeah, I wish I could progress better with your students. I'm so nervous I'm going to get you fired!"

"Don't be silly, Robert can't fire you. He would never be able to hire a replacement, and the other faculty aren't saints. You'll pick it up. Just give it a few more days."



## **Chapter 11 - Surprise! You Weren't Expecting Me...**

"It finally worked, Diana! I used that technique you taught me about scanning only one line ahead. It worked! I kept to today's schedule! Robert even dropped by and saw how good things were going. Best day ever for sure. Well, best day as you, at your job, ever," David said to Diana, ending with a little chuckle. He had been trying hard to keep things on track for Diana, and it looked like his hard work was finally paying off.

"I even got home and made arepas. I know how much you like them! Well, how much **\*I\*** like them, but you know, you have a body that likes them. That's what I'm trying to say. Anyways, come get some while they are still hot and fresh!"

Diana jumped at the opportunity, though she knew she needed to use a little restraint. David could quickly eat a half dozen of her arepas. Her mother had



taught her the recipe and told her it was the secret to a man's heart. Diana didn't believe that, but she did know that too many arepas would lead to a bit of belly if she didn't exercise restraint.

"This is so nice of you. I'm surprised you had the time to make these! My mother's recipe isn't the easiest to follow," Diana said, alluding to the poorly written recipe her mother had given her. "I really should write it out more clearly sometime soon."

"Oh, I didn't even think about checking the recipe. I was able to get right to it."

Diana was now worried. Had David just handed her a plateful of substandard arepas? What was in store for her tastebuds and stomach? Diana knew she shouldn't insult David after he had gone through so much effort and additionally done so after riding the high of a successful day at school. Diana took her first bite, and relief washed over her. The arepas tasted as she remembered them, which meant David followed her mother's recipe and technique. "You didn't need to follow Mama's recipe for these? They taste just like her's."

"No, it just came to me when I was thinking about something to celebrate the day with my **husband**."

"Babe, that's amazing, but maybe a little worrisome too?"

"Oh, how so?" David asked quizzically. He didn't seem to be following Diana's thoughts.

"Well, first, you called me your husband when it's just us. I think that's the first time you've ever done that. Second, how would you know my mother's recipe? I don't remember ever teaching it to you."

"Well... You've been calling me 'babe' for the last two weeks. That's always been my pet name for you, and you just adopted it like it was no big deal. I figured it was because of YourEssence. Is that not supposed to happen?"

"No, it's not... Well, I guess I don't know. There's not much information on taking someone else's doses for obvious reasons. I didn't even realize I had started calling you 'babe.' Now that you said something, I realize you're right. Do you think the pills could be affecting our minds?"

"I'd say the evidence is pointing towards yes. You're also right that you've never shown me how to make arepas, but I was here rolling, patting, and frying them up like I'd done it a hundred times. I went through all the prep and cooking without thinking twice about it. I was just **\*doing\*** it. I'm starting to worry. Our minds seem impacted, and that's more problematic than anything else we've experienced."

"Yeah, I agree. We need to do something soon. We're close to closing this deal at your work. I probably only need another day or two, and we can switch back afterward. The YourEssence will wear off overnight, and we will go back to our normal routines. Does that sound like a good plan to you?"

"About as good as any. You are great at this whole manufacturing management gig."

"Yeah, I don't know why, but it just clicks for me."

"And thankfully, I'm finally getting the hang of things at your work, too. Knowing I'll only be leading your lectures for a few more days makes me sad. I guess I've come to like it."

"Not enough to deal with permanent brain damage, though."

"No, of course not. Not worth the risk one bit."

"We may miss our newfound careers, but we're doing the right thing here. We'll be back to our old selves by Wednesday."

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"Diana, you need to come home as soon as possible. We've got a problem," David said with a noticeable concern.

"'Diana,' what's wrong? I'm just about to close on this deal. I wouldn't have answered if you hadn't double-dialed me," Diana responded, including her actual name, indicating she was in mixed company.

"Ugh! I'm so sorry. Close the deal but call me back as soon as possible. It's your mom. She's, well, she's here."

"Shit... all right. I'll call you right back."

David was doing his best to deal with Olivia, his mother-in-law, but currently, his body's mother. She had arrived unexpectedly at their door with two large overnight bags. So far, David had only gotten the justification that "I just wanted to see my baby girl for a while. Is that such a crime?" Which was right on brand for Olivia. She liked to make herself out to be a martyr. She had always been a doting wife and mother, but she was restless since her children had all left for school or marriage. David drew on some instinct and some observed recollection to do his best to handle his mother-in-law. While he doubted that Olivia would turn the

couple in for committing fraud with YourEssence, he wasn't about to cross that line alone. So David had to pretend to be Diana to a level that had not been necessary so far. He had to fool the woman who would know Diana the best. He had to 'be' Diana.

So, David focused all his attention and thoughts and pondered the right thing to do. It came quickly and sharply. David had a new and foreign idea appear in his mind. His 'mother' liked a cup of herbal tea in the afternoons. She took it straight without any additions. David would get some tea for her and sit her down to better understand what was happening.

"Here you go, Mama, a cup of tea just like you like it."

"Oh, chiquita, you are so sweet. Come sit with me."

"I'm happy to see you, Mama, but why are you here? It's kind of out of the blue..."

"Chiquita, can't we just sit and talk and not worry so much? I just wanted to see you; you have been so quiet these last few weeks that I haven't heard a peep from you. What's going on with you? Has David finally come around?"

David was surprised that Diana had spoken to her mother about their relationship troubles. *Of course, she had; Mama is my closest confidant.* This confusing but clarifying addendum popped into David's mind to conclude that thought.

"Oh, Mama, yes. David has been so much better these last few weeks. He's like another person. Our therapy sessions have helped."

"Therapy, hmph. You know I don't like therapists. You should just talk like two regular people. That's how tu padre and I handled things," Olivia said as David ruffled some unknown concerns of Olivia's.

"Sorry, Mama, but the therapist has been beneficial. I know you and Papa always work things out. That's why you are my married-couple role models," David said confidently. Previously, he didn't know that Diana felt that way, but now, he could feel it was true.

"Well, we have been married for a long time, and we raised you and all your siblings too. Each of my children was an honor-roll student, and then you all went off to college, one by one. So, I think we have done all right."

"Yes, mama, you've done very well."

"Speaking of niños, will we get any news about this from you and David anytime

soon? I don't want to be abuela geriátrica."

"Mama!"

"What? I think it's a reasonable question. You do want kids, don't you?"

The question triggered David's mind to work in overdrive. He tried to bring focus and narrow in on a response that his mother-in-law would believe. His response needed to align with what Diana had said in the past to this line of questioning.

David resigned himself to the response as it came to him. He was not thrilled with how it characterized him, "You know I do, Mama, but David needs more time to grow up before we have any children. That's part of why we're going to therapy. I need to know that David's ready to be responsible enough to be a dad."

"Yes, yes, you've said this before. Still, your father and I didn't make such arrangements. We just knew we loved each other, and we ended up pregnant. The way God intended."

"Well, that's not how I'm going to go about it," David responded, feeling how Diana felt about her mother's choices. Just as David was recovering from this shock, his phone rang.

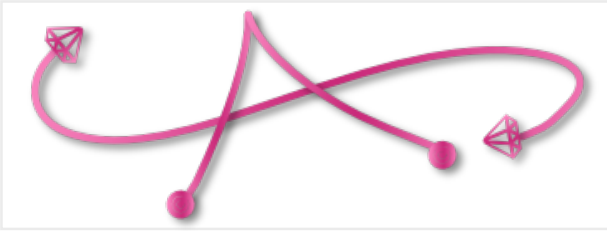
"'Diana,' is everything okay? You said your mother was here? She's not hurt or anything, right? No one else is hurt?"

"No, everyone is fine, 'David.' She says she just wanted to see me, but she has two overnight bags with her. She keeps avoiding answering me when I ask why she is here."

"That's just like Olivia. She doesn't like telling people what's happening in her life."

"Well, what are we going to do about it? It's clear she intends to stay with us, and we don't exactly have room for 'privacy' given our upcoming plans."

"Shit, you're right. I guess we will have to..."



## Chapter 12 - Persevere. Right?

"Shit, you're right. I guess we will have to keep going as each other until Olivia leaves," Diana said remorsefully. Her face looked like someone had died, and she was grieving the loss. David looked the same, which relieved Diana because she was not being truthful with her expression. She wanted to stay in David's body for as long as possible, and this was as good an excuse to continue doing so as any. The risk of more mental changes was worth it to her. Diana had experienced the thrill of being a respected businessman and was finally getting the recognition she so clearly deserved. She had the most unique and impactful insights into the problems David's work presented. Her natural leadership abilities helped her make quick work of all the obstacles that David's work could throw at her.

David's bosses had taken note, too. Pavan, David's boss's skip-level boss, had come down personally to thank Diana for her work on this project and commended her for her inventive solutions and creative communication approach. Pavan was a man's man and an old-school businessman by reputation. So, for him to compliment Diana was a tremendous achievement. David's boss had been personally selected by Pavan when he got his promotion, and Diana thought this was the first sign that she might be in store for the same treatment. So, when David had filled her in on the situation with Olivia, she knew she needed to tread carefully so she didn't show her true feelings.

"Damn, I think you're right 'David.' Hopefully, it's just a few more days, and we can change back. I felt more 'discrepancies' with my memories today," David said before continuing at a whisper's volume, "I'm starting to remember growing up as you. Out of nowhere, I suddenly knew that you consider your parents the ideal example of a married couple. It's not a huge revelation, but I already feel other things. It's like... I feel the 'edge' of a memory or feeling. All it will take is some stimulation, and then it won't be abstract anymore; it will be a real memory, and I'm having trouble distinguishing my memories from yours," David said with a deeper look of concern than Diana had ever seen. It worried Diana, too. She hadn't noticed symptoms similar to David's in her days, but she wondered if she had just blown past those feelings because she was experiencing so much euphoria living as David.

Diana and David spent the rest of the evening socializing with Olivia except for a

brief window where Olivia prepared dinner at her insistence. Diana was thrilled to get a home-cooked meal from her mother, but David was the one who would enjoy it the most. These new feelings he was manifesting seemed particularly strong around things Diana felt nostalgic for. So, having Olivia prepare a mole was a guaranteed path to David adopting more of Diana's memories. Just as Diana had expected, David raved about the food and had the most prominent look of contentment and joy as he eagerly ate the meal. Diana knew that feeling and was envious of how deeply David enjoyed it.

Olivia insisted again that she sleep on the couple's couch. She said she wasn't there to disrupt their routines, and after several rounds of back and forth between David and Olivia, they finally mutually agreed to Olivia's terms. After getting Olivia settled on the couch for the night, David and Diana found themselves standing in their en-suite together to finish prepping for bed. David was wearing a blue silk nightie and holding 'his' bottle of YourEssence. Diana looked at him with apprehension; why was he holding 'David's' pills?

"Everything all right, babe?"

"Even that now... I don't even cringe when I hear you say that."

"David, are you ok? You're scaring me..."

"No, 'David's' not all right. I don't even know how **\*I\*** am feeling. It's getting harder to think of myself as 'David.' Dinner did a fucking number on me."

"All right, why don't you tell me about it? We can get through this. I know we can!"

"God, I hope you're right..." David held his hand to his face and placed his palm on his cheek. He looked at his reflection in the mirror and seemed deeply in a trance. Diana just stood there staring and waiting for David to respond. An uncomfortable moment of silence passed, and Diana could feel the dread that David was experiencing. Just before Diana was going to try to comfort David, he started in. "Dinner made me remember the first time your mother made you a mole. She called you her big little chiquita and laughed. You both laughed. She had always called you chiquita, but you ate the mole with the adults, and she was so proud of what a big girl you were becoming. Hell, **\*you\*** were proud, but now all I can think is how proud **\*I\*** was. That memory feels like it's mine. It feels like me, but it's not, and that is seriously messing with me."

"Yeah, I remember that day too. You got it all right. She said all those things, and I was very proud. Clearly, YourEssence has some abilities that aren't advertised. God, David, I'm so sorry. It shouldn't be too many more days until we can change back. Just keep your mind on that. I'm sure we will get through this," Diana's reply

was genuine. Despite her secret joy in extending their time in each other's bodies, she knew she had to help get her mother back home as soon as possible. The only question was how to do that without making David out to be the worst son-in-law ever.

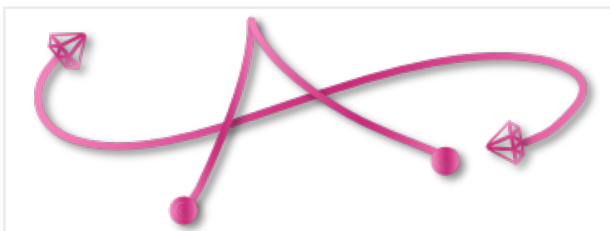
David started crying as he dropped the bottle of 'his' YourEssence onto the bathroom vanity. Diana embraced David to soothe him as best as she could. "Could you...," David started before stopping.

Diana pulled David back and looked him in the eyes. David had a curious look in his eyes. He looked incredibly vulnerable. "What do you need, babe?" Diana asked instinctively. She wanted to help David, and if there were something he wanted from her, she would go out of her way to make it happen.

"Could you... hold me, like I used to hold you, for tonight? I think it would make me feel better," David said as he resigned himself and downed the correct YourEssence pill to stay in Diana's body for another 24 hours.

"Yes, of course. Anything for you, babe," Diana said as she took her pill from the bottle David had discarded, sealing their mutual fate for at least the next day.

"Let's go to bed...," David said as he stuck his hand out to lead Diana. Rather than go to his usual side of the bed, David went to the left-hand side and lay down. Diana noticed this but wasn't going to correct him. She took her place on David's usual side of the bed and then wrapped her hand over David's body. Diana had been tentative in this action, not wanting to agitate David's fragile feelings, but David was swift in nestling himself against Diana's body. The warmth of their bodies next to each other was calming, and within a few moments, David was gently sleeping in Diana's arms. Diana felt a deep sense of protection and care for David as he slept in her arms. She was committed to doing the right thing for David. She would do anything for the 'woman' she loved.



### **Chapter 13 - Overexposure**

Diana was having the happiest of dreams. She didn't often have sex dreams, but she was deep into one of the sexiest ones she'd ever experienced. Even though it had been weeks since she had started living in David's body, she was still herself

in her dreams. That said, her current dream had her in the dominant role, and her sexual partner was the sub. This role reversal entices Diana to take a more aggressive approach to her lovemaking. Looking down, she saw David below her, and she proceeded to touch, kiss, squeeze, and caress David's body. As she continued her ministrations, she started to notice slight differences. David suddenly felt softer to the touch. His smell was sweeter. He started to seem tinier overall. Diana pressed her hands firmly into David's chest and felt David's chest expand into breasts. The experience should have shocked Diana; it should have terrified David, but it seemed natural. This newly feminine David submitted to every advance Diana made. While kissing his neck, David whispered seductively into her ear. "You're making me so wet..."

David's body rustled beneath Diana, and she felt his legs spread. Diana positioned herself between David's legs and instinctively started to press her crotch against David's. Rubbing like this was making Diana hornier, and this compelled her to increase her forcefulness. For Diana, her body was enveloped by a warm feeling, and her body's sensitivity was amping up; her skin felt electric. As she continued to make love to David, her sensations seemed to shift and then become more focused on her crotch. An almost painful straining sensation was radiating from her groin. Diana's rubbing turned to a more rhythmic pumping of her hips as she unconsciously pressed a newly formed penis into David's waiting entrance.

"Mmm," Diana made a small utterance as she woke from her dream. Transitioning from dreaming to waking constantly left Diana in a bit of a fog, and this time was no different. She felt something rubbing against her crotch and still felt that centralized pressure there in her groin. She started to press with her hips against the soft cushioning she felt against her body.

"Ungh," David started to wake as his body felt an odd satisfaction. He felt a firm warmth pressed against his backside, and instinctively, his body pressed and rubbed back against it. In his morning daze between sleep and wake, David allowed himself to succumb to the pleasure his body was experiencing.

As Diana repositioned slightly, her morning wood pressed out further from her body and gained the angle necessary to press against David's sex as she continued to thrust with her hips. Despite their clothes, the collision could not be mistaken. David's slumber ended immediately as he jumped away from Diana.

This motion was enough of a shock also to bring Diana to a fully awake state. "Oh, David, I'm so sorry! I didn't realize what I was doing. Oh God! Are you ok?"

David sat on the edge of the bed; his face held up in his hands with his elbows on his knees. Diana was worried he'd be upset, but David's reply was clear and unemotional. "Yeah, I'm ok. I just got startled there. Sorry, I didn't mean to startle



you."

"That's ok! You didn't do anything wrong. This body has a bit of a mind of its own, as you know! I'm the one who should have been more careful."

"Don't be sorry, I'm the one who asked to spoon last night. It was... it was soothing. Obviously, we were sleeping peacefully to have woken back up in the same positions."

"Still, I... I was the aggressor there. So, you know... I'm sorry I didn't ask for your consent."

"It's ok, Diana. I liked what I was feeling, too. I'm pretty sure I was rubbing against you just as much. I just got surprised when, well... you know."

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Diana was first to get up and get showered. After putting on her tie for the day, she told David she would get coffee brewing for David and Olivia. It was a "no students" work day for David as the university entered spring break. This meant that David could arrive at work later and that it would be less stressful for him.

"Ugh, too bitter," David said as he sipped his coffee. David had always liked his coffee strong, but in Diana's body, he had her tastes. Diana seemed to have brewed coffee in the style that 'David's' body liked without realizing it. David knew this to be the case because the pot was full. David poured out the pot and proceeded to brew a new pot of coffee that wouldn't be so strong. Olivia liked her coffee like Diana did, so this would ensure things got off to a good start for the day.

A few minutes later, Olivia emerged from the guest bathroom, smelling the coffee. "Chiquita, coffee's ready?"

"Almost, Mama; the last pot was too strong," David replied as she sat two cups down on the counter.

"What time do you have to go in today? Doesn't your work start by now?"

"It's a professors-only day. Students don't come in. Robert has us doing some new training that he thinks will improve student feedback scores. So I don't have to be in until nine."

"No students, but you still have to work. That doesn't seem fair. It would be best if you got to rest, too. You work too hard! I can tell you are exhausted. It's not good

for you! You won't get pregnant if you are so stressed."

"Not this again already," David sighed heavily before continuing, "We're not trying to get pregnant, Mama. I know you want grandkids, but we're not ready yet."

"Fine, fine. If I don't push you, it will be like when you wouldn't learn to ride a bike. You were almost a teenager before you tried, only because we pushed you into it."

Olivia's words pushed new memories to the forefront of David's mind, and he suddenly remembered learning to ride a bike... twice. Once as himself and once as Diana. Diana's memories were vivid and easily remembered. In contrast, David's memory felt distant and ephemeral and took effort. Effort that David was finding more challenging and more complicated to exert. Things were moving so fast, and his 'mother's' presence was not allowing the time to process.

"I don't think they're the same thing, Mama. Riding a bike on the streets is unsafe now. I was just a safety-conscious kid. You and Papa just pressed me because you thought I should have been more like you and how you grew up. You don't realize the world was different when I grew up in the city."

"Pfft, you remember it differently than I do."

"I'd imagine so," David huffed. He paused for a beat while he poured the cups of coffee. He looked up, and his mother-in-law tidied little things at the table. "Are you going to be ok here while I'm at work?" David asked with a twinge of worry as he handed Olivia a cup of coffee. He knew he had prepared the coffee to her tastes as he had accessed the information from Diana's memories. David was worried about accessing too many memories voluntarily like this. Still, he allowed himself to access this information, hoping it was a small enough intrusion that wouldn't cause significant damage.

"Yes, Chiquita, I brought my book, and I can help around the apartment for you. When was the last time you cleaned the shower?"

"You do not need to clean the apartment, Mama. It would be best if you weren't working that hard while you are our guest," David said, suffering another spontaneous memory. He recalled that his 'mother' had worked as a part-time home cleaner for years. David remembered going on weekends to help Olivia at her clients' houses. The houses were always spectacular in size and quality, but the inhabitants seemed like slobs. They were so messy and made no effort to clean independently. David recalled a vision of Olivia on her hands and knees scrubbing tiles and grout in a shower of a particularly odious man's home. This client seemed to get scum, dirt, and grime to cover every surface of his bathroom. In the memory, Olivia wiped the sweat from her brow and smiled back at Diana.

Diana wanted to be glad that Olivia was happy to see her, but she just felt frustrated that her mother had to work so hard for so little. David remembered Diana's promise to herself not to end up in the same situation in her life. David then became aware that this was why Diana decided to pursue college and become a professor.

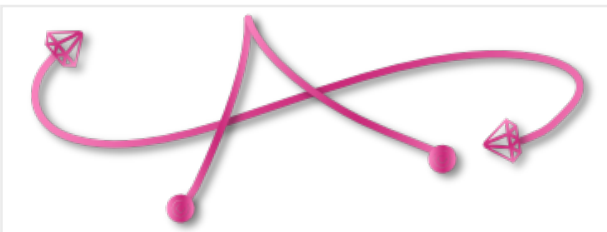
"You know I don't mind. I like it! It makes me feel like I am useful."

"You are useful mama. You don't need to clean the shower, in any case. I did it last week."

"Well, then, maybe the kitchen. Ovens get dirty so fast they can always use a good scrubbing," David knew that Olivia wouldn't relent, and there was nothing he could do to stop her anyway.

"OK, Mama, just be careful. I don't want you to hurt yourself or have you get overly tired."

Olivia adopted a bright smile, the smile that Diana's memories associated with love, and wished 'Diana' a good day at her job.



#### **Chapter 14 - Et tu Diana err, David?**

Diana felt good walking from her car to the office's front door. She was supposed to close the deal yesterday, and they had settled all disputes, but the client wanted to sign the agreement after sleeping on it. She hadn't brought it up with David after the whole ordeal with Olivia, but she knew she needed one more day in his body to wrap things up truly. The way David had explained his mental change symptoms, Diana was seriously concerned about her mind. *Was she also experiencing similar symptoms, and was she going to lose herself in David's memories? Was that what was happening to David? He was pretty ok with that whole morning incident. That probably would have freaked him out a lot more, as little as a few days ago.*

Brian ambushed Diana as she walked into the front door. He had been waiting for her to arrive, and from the look on his face, Diana knew that something was wrong. "What's wrong, Brian?"

"It's Tom. He is on the warpath. He made changes to the contract that legal hasn't reviewed. I can't reach counsel, and we are meeting with the client in thirty minutes. They expect to sign the version they agreed to yesterday."

"Fuck, I need the latest contract in my inbox right now."

"I just sent it. You'll have it when you get logged in," Brian responded urgently. Diana rushed to her office and immediately leaned in over the top of her laptop's keyboard. It was a posture that David used when he was feeling rushed or anxious about something. This was both. Diana's hands hovered over the keyboard while waiting for her virtual desktop to boot. The prompt to log in finally appeared, and she got her password typed in faster than ever. As she waited for her email to load, she recalled the last three work passwords that David had used over the previous year. *Shit, that's an example of what David was talking about. I shouldn't be able to remember things like that. I must be careful; I might forget the passwords of my real job.*

Diana scanned the new document for changes from Tom and was shocked at some of the early changes. "Fuck!" She yelled out in her office. The door was closed, but she could see people through the glass walls of her office stop what they were doing and look at her. Diana rushed out of her office and went to her boss's office.

"What the fuck, Tom? Are you trying to sink this deal?" Diana was incensed. She 'knew' that Tom liked to meddle in the small details of things his teams worked on, but this was far from his usual meddling. Memories of David's interactions with Tom came rushing rapidly into Diana's mind. He once forced David to put an employee on a performance plan, code for firing them. Another time was when Tom canceled a deal two weeks before the final delivery, right after David had been promoted. Next, a time when Tom refused to fire an employee who everyone knew was not pulling their weight. The memories rushed in and mixed instantly with Diana's anger, firming them up and putting them at the front of Diana's mind.

"You missed these things, David. After spending the last six months working on this client's portfolio, I thought you would know how to dive into these details. I guess I need to double-check your work earlier to make sure you don't skip these obvious things in the future."

"If you had feedback, you should have told me about it. Changing the contract this late puts the whole deal at risk," Diana said as she felt memories popping into her mind. They were moving in rapidly as her anger fueled a seemingly endless stream of memories to occupy her mind.

"You can see we didn't have time for that, right? Pavan would never close the deal

as it was written. I \*saved\* you a world of embarrassment in front of our executives. You should be thanking me rather than coming here as a hotheaded idiot."

Diana could feel her anger swelling. For the first time, she felt like she wanted to punch someone. It was more substantial than just a feeling. It felt like a compulsion. Like her actions were being preordained. Diana felt as more memories of David's life flooded her mind. She was fortunate they were because a memory of David's father counseling him on controlling his anger blinked into his thoughts just in time to prevent him from acting on his impulses.

Instead, Diana swallowed her pride and gritted her teeth as she replied, "I'll go study the changes more so I can present the contract to our client."

"Good... I'll see you in twenty. Conference room C."

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"I can't believe you pulled that out. Tom really fucking tried to sabotage that whole deal. When are our VPs going to see he is too big a risk to keep around," Brian said, raising a glass of whiskey to celebrate your closing the deal.

"Not anytime soon. He's like best friends with Pavan," Diana responded while also returning the gesture, raising her glass of whiskey before taking a deep drink from her glass.

"Aren't you getting close to Pavan now too?"

"Not the same thing; Tom got personally called up by Pavan. They have some history that got him his position."

"Yeah, it just sucks that he's such a made person here. You were the one who came up with the key solutions that sealed that deal. You were inspirational."

"Thanks. I didn't feel very inspirational earlier when I confronted Tom."

"It was like having the old David back. Fire and fury on full blast! I wish I had your courage, man," Brian said again, raising his glass to Diana. Brian raised his glass, seemingly intending to finish the remaining contents there.

Diana recoiled a bit at the comment. *Had she been like that? Was that more like David than she had been acting? Also, why didn't Diana know that David had a reputation as being a hothead at work?* "Come on, I'm not really like that. Am I?"

Brian set his now empty glass down. He turned to pour some more whiskey into his glass from the bottle on the desk between you both. "David Danger doesn't think he is full of fire anymore?"

The nickname triggered more of David's workplace memories to trigger. He had an experience growing up as a Youth Scout, where he was forced into leadership positions, which he resented. Diana became aware of how David felt about his job's responsibilities as these memories and feelings merged into her mind. David hated being a manager. He hated the politics of the office. He hated his boss. He kept it all up because his parents forced it on him as a kid and then because he needed to advance his career to provide for himself and Diana. His fiery disposition had resulted in his promotion to the level of his incompetence. Diana stepping into his body, and thus his job meant that these constraints were no longer holding him back. That said, David's reputation would be a huge obstacle to overcome.

"Shit, man, can't a guy grow? You said it yourself. That's the old David!"

"Yeah, you have been different. You have to tell me your secret. You're almost like an entirely new person. At least today proved that a body snatcher didn't replace you."

"That's way too old of a reference. You need to watch a movie from this decade."

"What? Invasion of the Body Snatchers is a classic," Brian said, taking another long drink from his glass. Diana did the same and poured herself another glass. She didn't bother to follow convention. Instead, she filled her glass close to the rim. Her ice rattled as the fluid lifted it from the bottom of the glass.

"It's more likely that I'd be abusing YourEssence. You saw that bio-drama about Adam Stevenson, right? The first man to take someone else's YourEssence. Zenée Radcliffe won a Golden Globe for their performance. They were fortunate that the role called for someone gender fluid to play both roles."

"Well, we know you aren't doing that! David Danger to the rescue!" Brian exclaimed with a fair amount of slurring in his delivery.

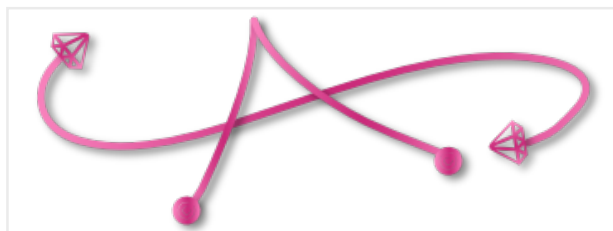
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Diana took a cab home. She was too drunk to drive herself, even with the self-driving support of her vehicle. Diana might have a little "David Danger" in her, but she was a rule follower, and operating a vehicle under the influence was still illegal. Self-driving engaged or not. Diana stumbled into the apartment. At an initial

glance, the apartment had been cleaned, as everything was tidy and arranged unusually for the couple. "Hello! I'm home!" Diana called out. It seemed like she was home alone, so she went to the bedroom and changed into her pajamas. She loved her flannel pants and the freedom to wear any old t-shirt as sleepwear. Or even no shirt at all. *That goes in the pro column.* Her thoughts had been toying with a pro/cons list of being a man versus a woman. Things that were better as a man went on the pros list. Things that were better as a woman went in the cons.

Diana had a very long pro list at this point. She stumbled her way into her en-suite and lifted the lid of the toilet. Pulling her penis out of her flannel pajama pants, he proceeded to urinate while humming to herself a silly tune that was stuck in her head. *Hehe, I'm draining the lizard—another item for the pros list. Also, a positive to add to the list is not sitting in pee by accident when you have to go in public.*

"Ugh, I'm still drunk... I'm going to take a nap. Maybe I'll wake up feeling better," Diana said aloud to no one. Making her way out of the bathroom, she came crashing down on her bed and rolled over to 'David's' side of the bed. It was the correct place for her to crash, so she ensured David wouldn't be disrupted if he tried to go to bed himself.



## Chapter 15 - Feeling Powerful In My Power Pose

"Hi, Janet! Good to see you this morning. I feel like it's been forever since we caught up. Let's grab coffee sometime soon," David was chipper as he entered the department lounge. Despite continuing to stay in his wife's body, he had enjoyed his morning. He shouldn't have, but it was clear to David that Diana truly loved her mother and that Olivia truly loved Diana.

"That would be great, Diana; we haven't chatted for almost three weeks now," Janet replied cheerfully as she acknowledged the gap. Her tone made it clear that there was no blame, just a mutual desire to catch up.

The blending in of Diana's memories was making David express himself much more freely. Each interaction he engaged in led, at a minimum, to some small memory of Diana's popping into David's mind. This included this short interaction with Janet he just had. In this case, the memory was mundane. The exchange had brought to David's recollection Diana's and Janet's last coffee chat. As easy as it

was for his mind to discover these small memories, it felt like floodgates opening every time David spoke to Olivia. Much larger portions of Diana's memory appeared in David's mind, and he found it more challenging to resist the mental changes.

Further, the strain of trying all was building up, and David thought it would be easier to let his mind collect these foreign memories without resisting any longer. *I still know who I am. So what if I suddenly know how to make arepas? It's not like I will open a Latin fusion restaurant with my English and Spanish food knowledge. Plus, I'm guessing Diana will be happy living with a husband who can cook. I know I always appreciated her cooking for me. Now, I can return the favor.*

As David poured a cup of coffee for himself, Frank entered the department lounge with a foul look. *He must be miffed about the mandatory training.* "How are you today, Frank?" David asked, maintaining his chipper attitude.

"Mmph," Frank muttered, then accompanied it with a further grumble as a response. He wasn't interested in conversing. David continued to stir his coffee as Carie came over to chat with him. As was their custom, David and Carie both embraced each other in a quick hug. "Girl, you are looking trim! Are you doing something different? Getting some action again, finally?" Carie jumped straight into the deep end with David. He knew to expect this. The number of scandalous things Carie had said to Diana far exceeded the number of ordinary stories. This trend persisted with David as he had lived Diana's life for her. "Nothing new, unfortunately, just a lucky-to-have metabolism, I guess," David responded, hoping to leave the last tidbit out. Carie wasn't going to let it go, however.

"And... David is finally getting things right in the bedroom again?"

David blushed as he thought of his interaction with Diana from this morning. He had been partly asleep, but his mind and body were both receptive to the sensations of Diana's morning wood being rubbed against his backside. A few more moments of that, and he might not have jumped when Diana's sex pressed up against his.

"Oh girl, you don't have to say anything. That look! He's revving your engine again, and all is right in the world! Yes!"

David didn't make any effort to correct Carie. She was close enough, and to his surprise, he didn't mind if Carie knew he was feeling turned on by Diana or, rather, by David's body. A memory of Diana at a sleepover when she was twelve flashed into his mind. A trio of girls sat in a circle with Diana as they swapped stories. They were sharing who they had crushes on. It felt like a coming-of-age ritual. Diana was embarrassed to admit her crush, but the other girls had revealed theirs. Diana



said the name quickly, and the other girls didn't laugh. Instead, they all chimed in their agreement. Diana felt oddly validated. She didn't need the other girls to tell her what she already knew and felt for herself, but the camaraderie of sharing so openly about something so personal felt good. It felt like a sisterhood. It was how David was feeling in this interaction with Carie.

Robert entered the department lounge as David and Carie continued to chat and chuckle with one another. "I'm glad you're feeling good, Diana. Carie," Robert said as he nodded at you both. Getting the other teacher's attention, Robert announced that the training would begin in five minutes and that everyone should go to the conference room.

Carie and David continued their conversation as they walked the hallway. Their laughter reminded David of two schoolgirls chatting as they giddily entered the hallway. Robert had the presentation already projected on the conference screen. Carie motioned to David to sit in the back of the room, but he felt compelled to sit up closer. He wanted to get the most out of this training if he had to be there. So Carie took a seat in the back, and David took a seat in the second row. Taking a seat in the first row felt like it would be overly eager of him.

David took notes as the presentation advanced. Robert had talking points for each slide, but the compelling data points immersed David in the training. By the end of the presentation, David had multiple pages of notes and had already formulated three direct actions he would take in his lectures when the students returned from their break. David felt incredibly energized by the presentation and looked forward to trying these techniques.

"It's good to see our old Diana back. You'd been sleepwalking these last few weeks. Was there a part of the presentation that stood out to you?" Robert asked as the group of teachers dispersed for the day.

"The whole thing was compelling, and I can see why you wanted to share this with us all. I already made a list of things to add to my repertoire."

"I'm glad to hear it. I knew you'd find your way out of that funk. My prior pep talks seem to have done the trick."

David almost laughed at Robert's response. His ego was inflated as David had found his talks to be as condescending and irrelevant as Diana had suggested they would be. "That's why you're the Principal. You know how to get the best out of us," David leaned in hard to the fantasy his boss was portraying and let him believe he was the one to turn David around.

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Returning home, David heard shuffling and rustling from behind his door. *'Mom' must still be rearranging things. I hope I can find what she put away in the wrong places when she's done.* "Hola mama, estoy de vuelta en casa." David accessed more of Diana's memory to respond in a language he did not speak fluently. He secretly hoped that Olivia wouldn't continue to speak in Spanish indefinitely. He wasn't sure how quickly he could access that information to respond fluidly.

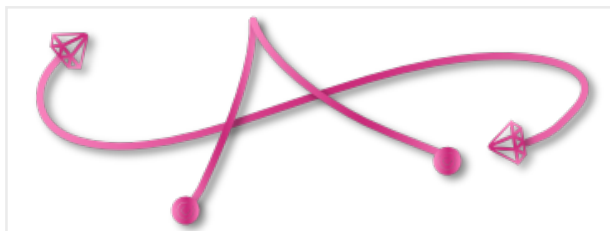
"Ahh, bienvenida, chiquita. ¿Cómo estuvo tu día de trabajo hoy?" Olivia welcomed her daughter and asked how her day of work went.

"Bastante bien, gracias. Tuvimos muchas conversaciones interesantes que resolver," David answered Olivia's question about his day while he leaned in to give her a hug. David scanned his apartment and noted the neatness and cleanliness of the living space. His mother-in-law had kept herself busy.

"¡Eso suena emocionante! Pero, no tenemos comida para cenar. Tenemos que ir al supermercado a comprar carnes y verduras para que te haga la cena," David's fear of conversing in Spanish was overblown. He was handling the conversation fine. His mother-in-law wanted some meat and vegetables to make dinner for Diana and him, so he needed to take her to the supermarket.

David put his school bag down and pulled out his keys to his car. He grabbed a smaller handbag that Diana used for short trips and flung the strap over his shoulder.

"Vamos, David estará en casa pronto."



## **Chapter 16 - Inspector Olivia**

Olivia was swift as Diana (really David) left the apartment. She needed to search the apartment for signs of trouble. She was tremendously worried about her daughter's marriage, given the fact that they were seeing a marriage counselor. Olivia would never have let a stranger into the most intimate details of her marriage. Diana's doing so felt like an obvious sign that her marriage was on the verge of collapse, and Olivia was not about to let that happen.

Olivia knew she couldn't go through David's phone; he would have that with him, but she knew the kinds of places men liked to hide things. So, under the bed, under piles of socks in dresser drawers, and behind or between shirts in closets, Olivia went rummaging through David's things. She had noticed that David didn't linger in the morning before he left for work. He didn't even say hello, good morning, or goodbye. That was not very husbandly behavior. Olivia was chagrined that she had warmly welcomed David into her family, and it seemed that David was ready to throw all of this away.

Olivia was a master of covert searching. She took quick notes of things like object order and placement while working through her son-in-law's possessions. Each failed search was just a new potential challenge to overcome against her adversary. Whatever David was hiding would be uncovered, and Olivia and David would privately address it. She may have it out for David, but Diana's happiness was essential in her mind. David would repent for his sins, and Diana would remain happy and married. Then, once the dust had settled, Diana would have babies, and Olivia would once again have a purpose to serve her grandchildren like she had served her children before. She was destined to be the best and most loving abuela.

Two hours passed, and Olivia found nothing out of order. She didn't find a telling secret scrap of paper with a phone number and the distinctive Xs and Os. No lipstick stain on a shirt collar, no restaurant receipts for a night out wining and dining a secret lover. Olivia was starting to wonder if she had been wrong all this time. It had only been a few weeks since they had started therapy, but Diana had been upset for much longer. Indeed, with that discontent, David would have left some clues about his sins.

Searching her daughter's en-suite, she stumbled on their respective bottles of YourEssence. "Ugh, jóvenes idiotas, putting this filth in their bodies," Olivia said aloud, making her thoughts on the UniGlobal product known to the empty apartment. She inspected the bottles and noticed they were labeled for David and Diana separately. They both looked identical to each other except for their labels. Olivia lingered here momentarily before replacing the bottles in their prior spots. She had a double take as she noticed that David's bottle was currently positioned on the left-hand side of the vanity. She knew that Diana had a predilection for choosing the left-hand side of rooms, beds, dressers, and such. Her bed had always been positioned so she would sleep on her left side. It was 'her' thing.

"All of David's things are on the left side. His comb, his razor, his pills. Qué extraño..."

Ever the master of stealth, Olivia replaced the pills and repositioned the disturbed

items expertly to avoid any potential for detection. "Diana had said she cleaned the showers last week. Let's take a look..." Olivia turned her attention to the shower and checked for signs of dirt or degradation.

"Not bad... I guess she remembers how to clean."

Looking at her watch, Olivia felt frustrated that her only clue was a misalignment of bathroom toiletries and pills. This was not enough to go on to fix David. She needed more. She needed to find the cause of her daughter's marital troubles. For a split second, Olivia considered the unthinkable. *Could it be Diana who is being unfaithful?* Olivia started to search her daughter's possessions but stopped herself. "No. She would have told me already. If she had a new amorcito, I would know by now."

"Still, Diana has been a bit off since I arrived. Maybe I should keep my eye out."

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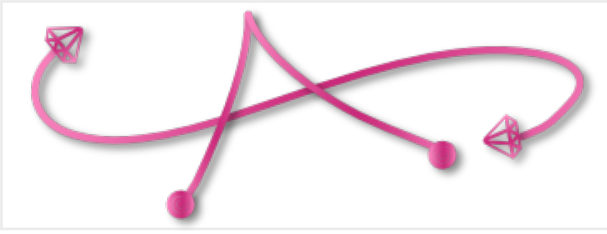
Olivia spent the rest of her day doing as she had informed Diana. She read her novella and cleaned the oven. While taxing, the work was made easier by having the right cleaners. Again, Olivia felt proud that Diana kept these essentials in her home. While it might not have been a glamorous upbringing, Olivia was proud of the practical work skills and ethics she had instilled in her children.

As it turned from noon to mid-afternoon, Olivia took the initiative to reorganize the living space. This set of obvious and brazen changes to the couple's things would cover any mistakes she made in replacing items as she searched. It would be too many things out of place, so David and Diana would not have the mental energy to process tiny discrepancies.

Olivia finished organizing the living space when she heard keys shake at the apartment door. *That should be Diana. I hope she likes what I did with her living area.*

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Diana and Olivia returned from the grocery store with more food than the couple would eat in two weeks, but Olivia had insisted that it all be acquired now. She would certainly keep her family fed, especially if she couldn't solve their marital problems as she had hoped. Olivia had Diana help put the extra food away while preparing a simple fajita dinner. While Olivia did this, Diana (really David) searched for David (really Diana).



## Chapter 17 - Darling, I... Oh, You're Sleeping

Diana was snoring loudly, and her sleep was troubled. Drunken thoughts swirled through her mind, creating robust yet incoherent dreams. Diana was in a fight with a warthog one second, and then the next, she was presenting manufacturing advances to a group of grade school children. There was only one persistent element to Diana's dream: David was there with her through all of them. David went from being concerned to supportive depending on the circumstances, but every time Diana saw David in her dream, she knew she was loved. This would have been fine, except for the drunken nature of her slumber. There in Diana's pajama pants was a raging hard-on. That loving sensation Diana was feeling wasn't just caring love. It was also hot, passionate, romantic love.

Diana's dream shifted as her thoughts became increasingly needy. All of a sudden, Diana was mid-coitus, and she was loving every second as she felt a strange blend of sensations. She simultaneously felt like she was penetrating and being penetrated. Looking down, she saw that someone was riding on top of her body. The body looked feminine, but there was no being certain based on the sensations that she was feeling. Looking up, she saw two perky breasts that looked a lot like her own breasts. They weren't **\*like\*** her breasts, they **\*were\*** her breasts. Diana reached out to grab them, but they were annoyingly just out of reach. Diana's gaze continued up, and she saw she was making love to David. His face was sweaty and contorted by the pleasures he, or maybe she, felt in the moment. Diana felt a pressure building inside. She was about to cum. Quickly, she shouted to David so he could be ready, move, or do whatever he wanted. Diana didn't know what to think. She felt her orgasm come on, and David shouted out in pleasure, "Yes! Fill me, David put a baby in me!!!"

"Oh shit!" Diana woke up in a panic. She grasped down at her groin as she felt the final surge of her wet dream orgasm dwindling. "Oh, I didn't mean to wake you. Sorry about that," David said as he quietly sneaked back towards the door through the bedroom.

"Oh, ungh. Yeah... no worries," Diana slurred out a response. It was abundantly clear now to David that Diana had gotten drunk sometime before landing in bed. "Had one too many huh?" David asked as his nostrils flared a bit at the odor in the room. He recognized it as a mix of semen and also a heavy amount of whiskey

breath.

"Yeah, I just need to go back to sleep..." Dianna wasn't up for a conversation, and David could understand why. From what he could tell, he expected Diana did not know where she was or even who she was talking to. *Brian must have gotten to her. I should have warned her about his ability to drink unendingly.* After placing a blanket over Diana, David quietly slid out of the bedroom. His thoughts were on Diana as he returned to the living room where Olivia was busily preparing dinner.

"It's just the two of us tonight. David isn't feeling good, so he's getting an early night."

"Qué triste, we will just have to have a mother-daughter dinner then," Olivia responded as she continued preparing dinner. David was delighting in the smells coming from the kitchen as his mind continued to betray him by connecting more and more of Diana's memories in his mind. He became aware of Diana's traditions of eating dinner together, coming together as a family, sitting together, and eating together over lively conversation. Diana's father had always been a stalwart defender of ensuring that the dinner table was a sacred place—no devices, no distractions, no delinquencies, and, of course, no deviating from the rules.

"Dinner smells amazing, Mama; what would you like to drink tonight?"

"It's fajitas chiquita, cervezas, of course!"

"All right, two beers for two ladies tonight," David said as he felt energized by the idea of spending time with 'his mother.' He worked happily to set the dining table, small though it was. David hopped in fluidly with Olivia a few times to help chop bell peppers or onions as she moved from skillet to skillet. One thing David always appreciated about Olivia was that she never missed an opportunity to make a feast. Chicken, steak, and shrimp fajitas were all on deck for tonight's meal.

Olivia placed the last skillet on the dining table and announced, "¡Ya llegó la comida!"

"Huele muy bien mama, gracias," David replied, celebrating the fabulous-smelling food. He felt all the joy of Diana's childhood memories welling in him as the smells triggered so many memories. David paused before digging into his plate of fajitas. He knew he had to show respect to his mother for making the meal. The custom had been drilled into Diana as a child, and he was not going to add any chance that they would be discovered.

"Buen provecho," Olivia announced and took the first bite of her meal. This was the sign to respond and then begin his meal.

"Provechito," David responded with the familiar phrase for dining with his family and then took his first bite. The taste was exquisite. Olivia was a skilled chef who made a delicious meal for them. For a moment, David felt bad for Diana that she was missing the meal, but only for a moment. The meal was too good to linger on any sadness as each bite was another explosion of flavor and joy—the result of Olivia's love for Diana.

"So, what did you get up to today, Mama?"

"I read my novella. Then I tidied up around the house. I cleaned your oven. The things I said," Olivia responded with a smile. Her facial expression was familiar and made David think about it. It felt like 'Diana' had seen it before.

"Mama, that's it?" David asked, letting the question hang. He had an intuition, and he was saying the words before he could even realize it. His head hung slightly askew after he finished his question to suggest his doubt.

"Chiquita, what are you suggesting?"

"I've seen that smile before, Mama. You got up to something. What did you do?"

"Bah, you know me too well. I was making sure you are okay, Chiquita."

"What did you do, specifically?"

"Nothing! I just looked through things, but I found nothing. So everything is fine!"

"So you snooped through our things. Mama, that's an invasion of our privacy."

"Pfft, privacy. Three generations lived in the same house when you grew up with us. We didn't have 'privacy'; we had a family!"

"Yes, but that's not how 'David' and I live. You need to respect our approach, too."

"Ok, ok. I will do. You have work tomorrow, too?"

"Yes, but it's only a half day. We are taking the training exam tomorrow morning, and when we're done, we are free to go. Why do you ask?"

"After 'cleaning' today, my nail broke. I thought we could pamper ourselves at the salon. What do you think?" Olivia said, holding up her left hand, which had a chipped nail on her ring finger.

"Sure, why not? It could be fun," David said. He couldn't recall Diana ever going to get her nails done with Olivia, but it was a simple invitation. It seemed like it would be rude to turn down the invitation. Unbeknownst to David, this was another peculiarity that Olivia noted. Diana had never wanted to get her nails done together before. Olivia was very particular about where she went for a manicure and pedicure, and Diana had no patience for this peculiarity. Olivia was building a picture of what might be happening with her daughter as she finished her last bites of dinner.

"It's getting late; you should go to bed. I will clean up here, and you can get some rest."

"No, mama, let me help you. It won't take as long..."

"No, no, no, I've got this. You work so hard, and your husband is still recovering from drinking too much."

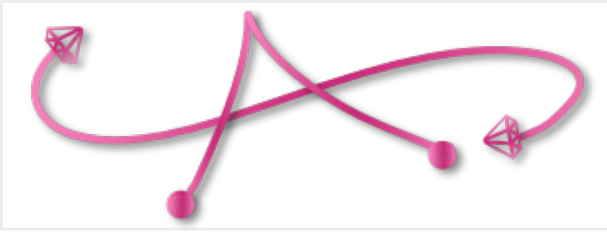
"How did you know that?"

"A mother always knows. Now, off to bed, chiquita. I will see you in the morning."

David went through the usual bedtime routine that he had become accustomed to these past several weeks. The lotions and other products no longer caused him the grief it once had. He could finally agree that Diana was right to use them as he woke up refreshed and ready to start the following day. Applying makeup to address bags under his eyes or blotches on his skin led to more prep time in the morning, and he already had enough steps to get through. A few minutes of washing his face and applying some products was worth it.

Lying down next to Diana, he could still smell the scent of whiskey. *God, he really went for it with Brian. I hope he doesn't wake up hungover,* David thought as he got under the covers. Diana was facing toward the center of the bed. Even though she smelled a little sour from the alcohol, David could also recognize the scent of 'his' body. Diana had always been enamored by the way David smelled. David hadn't thought much of it, but at this moment, he was keenly aware of its effect on Diana's body. He wouldn't take advantage of Diana, but a little snuggling close didn't seem like a violation. So, like the prior night, David snuggled in close to Diana in the little soon position and swiftly fell asleep in the comfort of the presence of her partner.





## Chapter 18 - Top 3 Ways to be Awakened

David was last to bed and first to rise. David was a frequent early riser, but not like Diana. She seemed to be preternaturally predisposed to waking before the sun was up. David sat in bed next to Diana and reflected on the past two days. He could see how he was becoming more and more like Diana. It was both conscious and unconscious behaviors. He was fluent in Spanish now. He knew Diana's family history very well, though it was not comprehensive. However, he also knew there was a minimal barrier to it becoming more complete. Now, lying in bed before the sun was up, David was aware that his very nature was adapting to be more like Diana's. He was sure there must be other things he had started doing without consciously being aware of them. In the moment, Diana's waking hour habits were noticeable enough to make him reflect on the subject.

David realized that he had to face facts; he was rapidly feeling more comfortable in Diana's body. Things 'she' wanted were becoming things he wanted. These compulsions no longer possessed the same characteristics that they had. A week ago, David could recognize Diana's desires from his own. They had a particular 'shape' as they entered his mind. It was distinct and different from his desires. This let David recognize the intrusive thought and then actively work to stop himself from following through. Now, there was minimal distinction in the source of desires. This had served David well in these last few days. David needed to be perfect in front of Olivia these previous few days. David was left questioning whether he had already started to gain this comfort before Olivia's visit or if Olivia's visit had caused it.

Further complicating David's thoughts this morning was the impetus for David and Diana to engage in couples therapy. David could now feel the relationship distance that had developed between Diana and himself. Despite Diana's appeals that he uses this time in her body to better understand her perspective, he had avoided 'leaning in' to the body swap's more intimate opportunities for deep consideration. However, how he felt now made David feel much more connected to Diana. David glanced over to Diana next to him.

Diana was sporting morning wood. David could feel an urge that he had never felt before. One that his heterosexual male mind should have rejected. He was wondering what it would be like to suck on Diana's dick. Even seeing it out of

Diana's boxers would entice him. *Fuck, am I going to do this?!* David's urges felt so strong and natural that he started to remember the first time Diana had ever seen a penis up close. The excitement, the sexual awakening, the lust, the pleasure. Without realizing it, David had positioned himself between Diana's legs at the end of the bed. He would just need to pull her boxers down and have the same experience. He remembered the first time Diana had gone down on her then-boyfriend David. David could remember that Diana had been so excited to see his dick. The size and girth weren't porn star sizes, but they were on the higher end of sizes overall. Instead of feeling pride in his dick, he instead felt excitement over the prospect of playing with it.

Diana was sleeping heavily still but seemed to be beginning to wake up. David decided to go through with it. A blowjob to wake Diana up would be a welcome surprise for her and would get this urge satisfied for David too. Pulling Diana's boxers off, David neglected to lift the elastic over her erect penis. This caused it to swing wildly and enticingly as the band pulled her penis forward and then released it quickly. The surprise of this motion woke Diana, who wearily asked what was happening. With conviction, David wrapped his hand around the base of her shaft and responded to lie back; he had everything under control.

Diana's mind was still a bit cloudy, but she soon recognized the sensation of a hand wrapped around her penis. Like David before, she was quickly remembering the first time she had given David a blow job. It had started similarly with her placing her hand around the base of his penis. Only this time, Diana wasn't remembering the act of giving a blowjob; she was remembering the receiving end. The slightly cool but firm hand wrapping around her dick, the immediate building of pressure deep in her groin, the pleasure, the passion, the desire to reach release.

David gently rubbed Diana's length as he lowered his head. What should have been a line he wouldn't cross was effortlessly surpassed as his mouth enveloped the tip of Diana's penis—a little salty, a little bitter, a lot sexy. David's mouth and tongue got to work quickly as the last remaining objections in his mind were silenced. 'David's' cock was in his mouth, and he was going to show his 'husband' how much he appreciated having her in his life.

Diana moaned in response to David's efforts. "Shh, 'my' mother will hear you!" David scolded Diana. He didn't want to get an earful from Olivia at the salon later today. Diana whispered her acknowledgment as David continued to work on Diana's cock. With each bob of his head, David felt his pleasure and confidence increasing. It didn't take much longer until David felt Diana's body tense up. He knew what was coming. Diana tried to tap his shoulder to let him know to move away, but the process was too swift. Diana unloaded into David's mouth. It shocked him at first despite having seen the warning signs. After the initial shock,

David sat firm in his resolve. He was staying put and taking Diana's load fully into his mouth.

After a few final sputters and releases, David pulled off of Diana's dick, and to his immense surprise, he swallowed. Diana had never done that before, and David knew it. "Holy shit, did you just swallow?" Diana whispered her shock.

"Yeah, it seemed like the right thing," David effortlessly answered.

"You were the one who always wanted me to swallow. I didn't ever want to," Diana said with some shock. "I'm not complaining, but what brought this all on?"

Possibly for the first time, David giggled. This was not a typical laugh; this was a full-on feminine giggle. "I just didn't want that morning wood to go to waste. You've been so good to me and 'my mother' these last few days, and I know how hard work is for you right now. So, it was a present for you... and I got something from it, too."

Diana was reeling still from the afterglow of her orgasm, but the reaction from David had her immediately worried. He sounded like, well, like Diana. Not in how he sounded like her but in how he spoke. In the words of his sentence. In the personalization of the sentence. "My mother? You mean she's my mother, right? You know you aren't actually Diana? You are David."

"Yeah, of course! A slip of the tongue is all that was, **Hot Stuff.**"

Diana noted the adoption of her most intimate pet name for David. David had primarily avoided any such blending before. She knew something was amiss, but she couldn't help but feel this might still be healthy for their relationship. Diana needed David to appreciate how vital their intimacy was to her. She needed David to understand that if she was part of this relationship, she needed to feel love given and reciprocated.

"All right, I mean, I'm not complaining. That was amazing. I'm delighted you took the initiative. We hadn't done anything like that since we got drunk those weeks ago."

"Yeah, and I only did that because I thought it would be my last chance to experience sex for the other side."

"How are you feeling now?"

"Umm, different..."

"Different, how?" Diana asked, wondering just how far this change in David's disposition went and just how aware of it David was.

"I get why you wanted us to go to couples therapy now. You deserve to be with someone who appreciates you and shows that through their actions as much as their words."

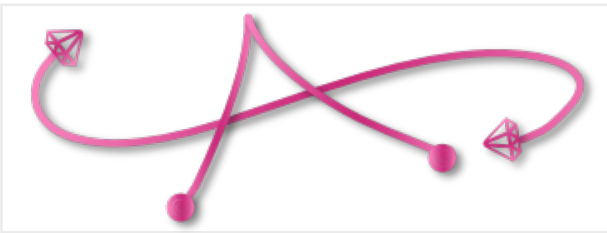
"That's good, but is that all there is to this?"

"Well, I can't help but feel a bit guilty."

"Why's that?"

"You're my hot hubby; I think *\*I\** get the better end of the shaft, hehe," David giggled again in a hyperfeminine manner.

*Shit! He is losing himself. What happened yesterday? Did he spend too much time with my mother? He was worried about that. I probably shouldn't have gotten so drunk. I could have intercepted my mother and kept him more at arm's length. Fuck! What do I do now?* Diana's thoughts raced.



## **Chapter 19 - No Time and No Solution Make Diana Go Something Something**

Diana left David lying in bed as she went to get showered for the day. He had a later start for the day, so he said Diana should get ready first. To Diana's shock, he didn't ask to use the restroom. Not to brush his teeth or anything. Diana knew she never would have done that. While she enjoyed giving a blowjob from time to time, the first thing on her mind afterward was constantly cleaning up and brushing her teeth. While this dissonance was alarming, even more troubling was the fact that Diana had experienced flashes of some of David's desires while reflecting on this blowjob. Diana could remember that David found it sexy when a woman swallowed. She couldn't help but feel a bit of the same as this memory integrated itself into her mind. Seeing David lying there in one of her nighties was confusing in a way it never had been before. Like David had adopted the use of husband, Diana felt like she was looking at her wife. This seemed small on the surface; they were, in fact, in the bodies of the people who filled these roles. Up to now, they hadn't

internalized that, however. Diana knew that David in her body was her husband and vice versa. Now, it was David as her wife, according to her brain. Diana was freaking out a bit, just like David had a couple of days prior. She lamented that she hadn't taken David's warning more seriously then. She could have sacrificed **\*David's\*** relationship with Olivia and kicked her out of the apartment. That might have been enough to keep David from sliding so precipitously into Diana's memories.

Diana hopped into the shower and, for a moment, felt some relief. The warmth of the shower was pleasant, and her thoughts drifted momentarily as she allowed herself to feel. Feel the water, feel the warmth, feel the pleasure. *Oh no, mmm...* Diana's thoughts returned to the morning blowjob. David had worked her member magnificently, unlike any sexual experience 'David' had ever had. Diana's mind rushed through a host of sexual experiences as her mind searched for a comparable experience. Each of these sexual conquests wedged itself newly into Diana's brain, but she didn't realize the damage that allowing her mind to wander like this could bring. She was still largely ignorant of the impacts of memory recall on her mind, body, and behaviors. She was of the continuing belief that she hadn't suffered any similar side effects as David was experiencing.

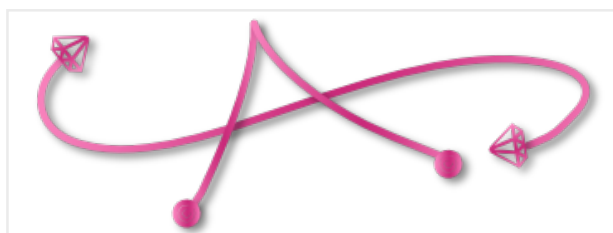
Even though she was in the shower, Diana could hear something coming from the bedroom. It sounded like moaning. *Is David masturbating?* Diana wondered. She felt as blood rushed to her member, bringing back an erection into view. *When in Rome...* Diana thought as she instantly started to rub her hand up and down her dick's length. A week ago, Diana never would have done this. Sure, she had masturbated in David's body. A man's body and hormones make it practically impossible to avoid, but she would have at least stopped to think about it for a minute. She was more accepting of the body swap than David, but that didn't mean she would take advantage of the situation.

Diana's mind was in a full-blown memory rush as she pumped her dick, thoughts of ex-girlfriends of David's, crushes, his first time reaching orgasm as a teen, the shock, the embarrassment, the thrill. Diana was feeling masculine to the extreme as she reached another climax.

Despite her intentions to devise a plan for her and David to get back into their original bodies and stop this slide that David was experiencing, she had failed to come up with anything. Having towed dry, she unconsciously wrapped the towel around her waist and stepped back into the bedroom. It smelled like sex in there. David was still lying on the bed and seemed to be passed out, possibly from over-exertion. Diana knew that a good orgasm could certainly necessitate a bit of a rest. Rather than disturb David, she tried to get dressed as quietly as possible. When she heard David, she bent over to pull up her boxers. "Woo, keep it off sexy!"

Diana's heart pounded. The passion she had been searching for from David was finally here; she only needed to act on it. David was willing to go further with her. Diana's hormones had her erect again in an instant as she wrestled with her desires. On the one hand, this was everything she had wanted. David was willing to engage in a physical and intimate relationship again. Diana's heart longed for this and had for so long. On the other, this was potentially not David's true wish. He had been impacted these last two days by the effects of YourEssence on his brain.

Diana was still paused in the bent-over position with her hands on the elastic of her boxers. She had to decide and fast.



## **Chapter 20 - Diana's Only A Man Afterall**

Diana felt her body take over as the faint tickle of her boxers collecting against her ankles made David giddy. "Woo! There's my man! Now come over here so I can show you my appreciation," David's voice oozed with sex appeal. Diana heard the words coming out of David's mouth and could practically hear herself saying the exact words if their positions were reversed. This was starting to freak Diana out. More than ever before, she had this nagging sensation that it wasn't David she would be having sex with; it was 'Diana.' It was like having sex with her clone. Diana couldn't let this lie unaddressed.

"David, babe, you sure you are up for this?"

"Hell yeah! Morning sex is the best kind of sex, plus you already know I'm horny this morning. Might as well take the edge off, given the day ahead of me," David said back. This put Diana's concerns at ease as she knew she would never have responded like that. So, without reservation, Diana set to task and ravished her husband's feminine body. Her current male body wanted this just as much as David did. Diana could feel her passion vibrating through her, and she was again overwhelmed by the concentration of her sexual energy in her crotch. It was so different from how she had felt in her own body. She felt so much power, so much energy, so much desire. She finally understood why guys were so incessantly trying to get to the penetration part of sex. It was like her body could barely exist a moment more without it. So, despite the brief moment of foreplay, Diana rushed to

press her penis into David's entrance.

"Mmph, a little warning next time?" David grunted as he felt Diana press herself into his vagina.

"Sorry, I just got so excited there," Diana replied, but her attention wasn't really on David's words. Diana was singularly focused on pumping her length in and out of David.

David was similarly distracted, but the shock of being so abruptly penetrated had brought a focus to his mind that hadn't been there. *Diana is acting like a teenage boy crazed over getting her dick wet*, David thought as he lay there, taking the thrusting of his partner in stride. *I wonder if she realizes how she is acting. It might be good fodder for our next counseling session.* David's mind began to wander as he was overcome by the pleasure emanating from his body. *I wonder what Dr. Simms will think when I tell her that we resumed having sex again. Will she call it progress that \*I'm\* finally getting 'David' to pay more romantic attention to me? Or will it be too soon to tell?* With these thoughts, David's mind slipped into a deeply 'Diana-centric' space. David's previously stoic disposition suddenly changed. He became much more effusive in his vocalizations. He was moaning and reacting to Diana's touch and thrusting. Diana took note and responded in kind, increasing her effort before she finally had to tell David to take it down a notch.

"Shh! My mother will hear!"

David covered his mouth with his hands as he let out a deeply satisfied moan, which, fortunately, was now muffled. Diana was approaching climax and looked down at David. "You've been taking my pills, right?"

"Yes, every night."

"All right, because I'm close."

"Oh, me too!"

"David, I'm going to cum; you're on the pill, right?"

"Huh?" David looked confused at Diana's words. It was too late to do anything about it, however. Diana couldn't hold back anymore as she unloaded inside David. The brief moment of confusion was overtaken by pleasure on David's face as he wrapped his legs and arms around Diana, pulling her in closer against his body as his orgasm crashed over him.

After a brief moment of blissful cuddling, Diana pulled herself off David.

"My birth control. You've been taking that right, David?"

"Hmm? *\*Your\** birth control? I didn't know that you were taking the male pill."

"Focus up, David, *\*My\** birth control. You know, so you don't get pregnant from what we just did. You've been taking that, right?"

David looked confused at Diana. Something wasn't registering for him. This misunderstanding frustrated Diana, and David finally said what he was confused about. "Why do you keep calling me David?"

Diana's heart sank. Sure, it had been a bit confusing about what birth control she had been referring to. That was built into the odd situation they found themselves in. That was a simple frustration with the language and how science had complicated things. No, instead, this was Diana's worst fear manifesting. It had been David's, too. Diana needed to figure out what was up and fast.

"David, that's you. Remember? I'm Diana, and you're David. We've been taking each other's YourEssence for several weeks due to your work project?" Diana paused to see how David was responding. She wasn't getting any visual clues that this was resonating with David. "Shit, David, don't do this. You're scaring me."

As if a switch flipped, David responded, "Yeah, of course, we've been this way for weeks. Thanks for reminding me of the obvious." His response rang false to Diana's ears. He was making it seem like nothing had just happened. *Was that how he felt? What was that? Did he **\*believe\*** he was me?* Diana's thoughts raced. "You don't remember what happened? Like 5 seconds ago?"

"Well, besides you giving me an amazing orgasm, I'm not sure what you're talking about."

Diana hung her head. The effects of YourEssence on David's mind were visible to Diana now. Diana had to wonder how much longer he could tolerate the use of her doses before David ceased to exist. "We need to get your mother to leave. Tonight. You have to change back tonight."

"What? Why?"

Diana was shocked by this reaction. It seemed like every other response from David originated from the parts of his mind that were Diana and not David.

"Do you really need me to explain it? You don't even seem to be able to tell what is happening to you. You're acting like 'me' without even realizing it now."



"That's silly. I know who I am. Besides, I would have thought you liked that I was getting to understand you better."

"Are you sure that's all that made you think that? Or did you actually want to spend more time with my mom?"

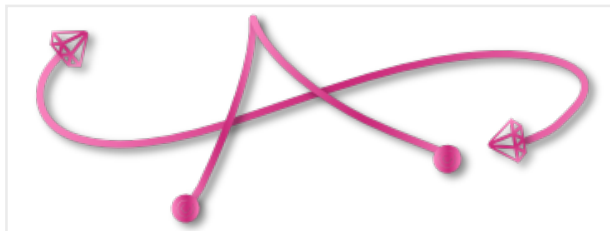
"What? I've enjoyed spending time with her."

"Since when has that been true? You've always tolerated my mother, but I wouldn't call you close."

A momentary pause silenced the room while David considered Diana's words. Then, a moment later, David held his hands up to his face as tears started flowing. After several minutes of sobbing, David finally replied, "You're right. This has gone too far. I can't tell where these thoughts come from; it all feels like me."

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David and Diana were on edge as they exited their apartment for their respective jobs. Olivia had been her usual chipper self, offering to make breakfast for the married couple, but they politely declined. Diana needed to deal with the fallout of her outburst at work, while David had the daunting prospect of getting through his job only to spend the afternoon socializing with his mother-in-law at a beauty salon. Something he never would have imagined he'd do, but he was strangely looking forward to it. Similarly, he was enthusiastic for his training at school to conclude as well. He could feel the passion that originated from Diana about improving his teaching technique. It worried David how much that feeling just felt natural. They felt like they originated deep inside his mind. The fact that it was foreign was only knowable because of David's remaining knowledge of himself. That memory would soon disappear if things continued on their current trajectory. David resolved to do as Diana had directed. He would get Olivia to leave so he could revert to living as himself.



## **Chapter 21 - Lose Yourself They Said, It Will Be Fun**

"All right, that's time. Turn in your exams now," Robert called out to the room.

David saw that a few professors hurriedly filled in the remaining bubbles on the multiple-choice exam form. David had finished a few minutes earlier and felt satisfied that his knowledge of the material was sufficient to ace the exam. The morning supplemental course material had been engrossing enough; the opportunity to demonstrate his understanding had David practically floating. Diana's passion for teaching had deeply engrained itself in David, and he couldn't process this passion as anything other than organic and natural.

As the group of teachers started to disperse for the day, Diana's work friend Carie scuttled over to gossip. "Did you hear about Frank?" Carie asked under her breath.

"No, what?" David matched Carie's volume level as he leaned in to continue the conversation.

"I heard that his transfer to New Mexico University got denied. Too much 'male ego' in his interview with the school admin. Can you believe that? A principal who listens to their employees? Who would have guessed it!"

"No! That's amazing. I can't believe the chauvinist is finally getting his comeuppance. What's Robert going to do?"

"Probably nothing. Eagle Sky is in a rich neighborhood. They can afford to turn away teachers. Robert can barely afford a belt to hold his pants up. Thank God for that belt buckle. It's doing the Lord's work!"

"Stop it! You're too much," David chuckled out his response as he batted at Carie's arm playfully.

"What?! You'd prefer he shows a bit more crack?" Carie jokingly responded as the two made their way to the parking lot.

"So, what do you have planned for your afternoon off?" Carie asked as they reached their cars.

"Spending the afternoon with my mom. We're going to get our nails done."

"You don't sound too excited about the prospect."

"No, I am. It will be nice to have some time with her one on one. I have a moderately uncomfortable topic I need to discuss with her."

"Like how David isn't giving it as good anymore, and you need to move home?"

"I'll have you know we are doing great in that arena. Twice this morning, thank you

very much."

"Girl! You're finally getting some again. Thank goodness. You were so bitchy when you weren't getting any."

"What can I say? I have a healthy sex drive. So sue me."

"No one says that anymore. It would help if you listened to your students more often. Pick up the lingo of the day."

"I don't think the kids call it lingo either."

"Fine. Fine. At least update your references to the last ten years instead of pulling from your parent's generation."

"I'll try."

"Perfect! Back to your mother, however. What's the problem if David is finally back giving you the D."

"She just suddenly showed up this week and isn't telling us why she's staying with us. David wants her to go back home, and I need to be the one to convince her."

"David wants her gone? How do you feel about that?"

David had been managing through the morning, but Carie's rapid-fire conversation had him acting on pure instinct. This was a recipe for disaster. Even though David could operate effectively with Diana's passion for her career, something about Diana's feelings towards her mother had a way of activating the purest aspects of Diana's feelings in David's mind. So, like what happened earlier in the morning when he felt Diana's love and passion, David's mind flipped. The aspects of David that remained were now buried under the weight of Diana's emotions and feelings.

"Frankly, I'm bummed out about it. David knows how much my family means to me. I'm worried about my mother, and it's not like her to unexpectedly visit like this. She doesn't like being away from Dad this long. I know something's up. I have to get her to tell me."

"Well, I'm not one to meddle, but you should do what feels right to you **\*Diana.\***"

Hearing Carie say that was like driving a stake through the remaining aspects of David that existed in his mind. David felt reinvigorated and practically made new by the connections forming in his mind.

"You're so right. Thanks, Carie. I'm sure David will understand."

\*\*\*\*\*

"Chiquita, that was such a nice thing to do with you. I haven't been pampered like that in forever," Olivia celebrated as she stared at her nails while she held her arm out to get a good perspective on her hand.

"It was mama. Why haven't we done this before?"

"You never really seemed like you wanted to chiquita. I was surprised when you agreed to come."

"Well, I didn't know what I was missing."

The mother and 'daughter' pair walked through the shopping center to which the salon had been attached. While walking, David was entirely consumed by Diana's thoughts. Still, unbeknownst to him, his desires had blended with Diana's to create a version of Diana that represented David's idealized version of Diana. Hence, his enjoyment of the salon originated from David's desire for a more traditionally feminine partner.

"Mama, I want to stop in here. There's something I've wanted to do forever, and I feel like it's almost a right of passage to do it with your mother."

"What's that chiquita?"

"I want to get my ears pierced."

"Really? You hated it when I had you get your ears pierced as a bambino. Why the sudden change?"

"It just feels right. I can't explain it any other way. I know David will like it, and I think I'm finally ready. Again..."

"You don't need my permission, but I'll go with you."

Ten minutes later, David and Olivia were leaving the shop with David's ears freshly pierced. David had asked Olivia to hold his hands as the piercing gun rapidly shot the needle through his earlobe. He remembered the 'first' time he had experienced this as a child and how much he didn't want it then. *How things change*, David thought wistfully.

Looking across the shopping center, David's eyes landed on the trendy chain restaurant. "Why don't we get dinner, just the two of us?"

"Sure! You know I won't turn down a chance to spend more time with you!"

David and Olivia sat at a table by the window, allowing them both to watch as patrons made their way around the shopping center. A quick visit by their waitress and ordered their drinks and an appetizer.

"So, how are things with David? Really? I can tell something is not right. You haven't called as much lately. I'm worried about you," Olivia asked as the waitress dropped off their drinks.

"You know me too well, mama; things were difficult there for a while. David hadn't been paying me enough attention, and it was hard to feel good about myself. We've only been married for a year and a half. I didn't think the passion would disappear that soon. Fortunately, we started seeing a counselor, and she's helped. Not to be indelicate, but **\*David\*** has improved a ton since we started seeing her," David said, concluding his statement with a devious little smile as he sipped his margarita.

"Well, that's good to hear. I thought he might be having an affair; a mother can always tell when something is wrong. I checked his things; I didn't find anything wrong."

"So that's what you were looking through our stuff for. You should have just said that."

"I wasn't sure how you would respond. You were acting so strangely, too. I thought for sure that you were pretending to keep a straight face despite your husband's infidelity. I didn't want you to be upset that I suspected him."

"Well, he isn't cheating on me. I know he's not like I know the back of my hand," David said as he held his hand up. Looking at his hand with its newly painted nails, he was shocked by how feminine he looked. His neatly shaped and polished nails had him mesmerized until the waitress returned with their food a moment later.

The mother and 'daughter' continued their conversation over food and drinks until things reached their natural conclusion. David had deeply enjoyed their time together, and the conversation had been joyful.

"I'm so glad I don't have to worry about you anymore, chiquita. You don't know how much stress that causes. Well, maybe someday you'll know," Olivia said as

she glanced down at David's midsection.

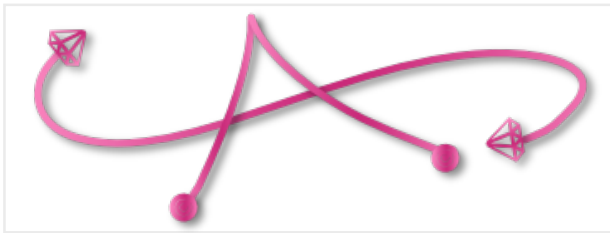
Instead of responding with a dismissal, David wishfully imagined a future that included children. He unknowingly placed his hand over his belly in a way to suggest he was considering the prospect.

"So you do want children! I knew it! It would be best if you talked to David. Tonight! It would be best if you talked to him tonight. Tell him how you feel! He will respect your wishes; I know it."

"Mama, it's more complicated than that. David doesn't know what he wants when it comes to children. I have to wait until he is ready," David said, reticent to the reality of his 'husband's' family desires.

"I think I've said what needs to be said. You deserve to be happy, too, Diana. You get to want things, too," Olivia said as she finished the last gulp of her beverage and stood up.

"I'll be off then. You have a lot to discuss with your husband," Olivia said as she started to leave David, who was sitting there stunned at Olivia's actions. "I'll be waiting for the 'good news,' you can call anytime!"



## Chapter 22 - David Jumps In The Deep End

"Olivia? David? Anyone home?" Diana called out as she entered the apartment. She saw David's shoulder bag on the kitchen table and knew that David had at least come home at some point. Diana continued to call out to anyone to see if someone was home before she noticed that Olivia's bags were not in the living room anymore. *Did he manage to do it? He was so uncomfortable with the idea this morning.* Diana's inspection of the space seemed to confirm it, in any case. Olivia had left. They had the apartment to themselves and would thus be able to revert to their original bodies tonight. Diana was ecstatic as she practically jumped for joy.

"What's got you so excited? You look like you won the lottery," David asked as he emerged from the bedroom.

"My mother, she's gone. You did it!" Diana said as she continued to dance in place, moving her arms and hips around in joyous little motions.

"Yes... my mother decided to head back home. She said she was finally satisfied that things were okay between us. She thought you were cheating on me, so she dropped in on us unexpectedly. The idea that you would cheat on me is pretty far-fetched, but you know how mothers are."

Diana's dance of joy gradually stopped as she heard David's response. *Shit, he's back to believing he's me. I need to get through to him... Wait, are those studs in his ears? Did he get his ears pierced? My ears? I don't want pierced ears; why would he do that?*

"So, umm... 'Diana, did you have a good time with your mother this afternoon?' Diana asked cautiously. She didn't want to disturb David if she was misreading the situation, and she didn't want to swing the opposite way either by disrespecting whom David felt he was. Either could result in explosive reactions after so much time apart. Diana couldn't know how long David had been experiencing this either.

"It was a great afternoon; thanks for asking, sweetie," David replied, leaning in and giving Diana a peck on the lips.

"I see you got your ears pierced. That's... new."

"Yeah! I realized I wanted to do it, and we made it a little rite of passage. Mama and I went in, and she held my hand while I got it done. It was cute. It hurt like heck, though," David said and then paused as he modeled his ears swaying side to side, showing each ear off as he framed it with his hand. "Do you like them?"

Diana felt a simultaneous dual response populate her mind. *Yes! No!* Her thoughts rang out. David's 'yes' and her 'no' hit the tip of her mind with equal weight. It scared her immediately amidst the demonstration of YourEssence's mind-altering effects she was observing in David. *If I had two opposite reactions, that means one of us liked seeing me in earrings. I'm guessing that's David. This means that even though David thinks he's me, his mind's desires still exist. I need to figure out how to make him remember himself.*

"I think they are exactly what \*David\* wants."

David paused and looked quizzically at Diana before continuing, "I'm glad! I got my nails done, too. Don't you think they look fabulous?"

"Oh, yes, \*David\* likes them a lot."

"All right... so I had something to discuss with you, David. Would now be an ok time to bring it up?" David asked, emphasizing the use of 'David' in the sentence to call attention to the fact that he had noticed what Diana was saying.

"Yes, now would be fine. **\*David\*** is available to talk."

"Ok, what's the deal? You keep saying your name in every sentence. It's weird, cut it out."

"Do you think hearing the name **\*David\*** is weird?" Diana asked, raising her eyebrow.

"Yes, what you're doing is weird. I'd prefer you cut out the silliness because I want to talk to you about something serious."

Diana could see her gambit wasn't working, so she straightened up and clarified to David that she was giving her undivided attention. "Ok, go ahead..." Diana said before mumbling "David" at the end.

"Well, it's about us and our future. I was talking with Mama and realized I was done waiting for the perfect time. I, gosh, this is hard; I want to start a family with you. I think it's time we think seriously about kids."

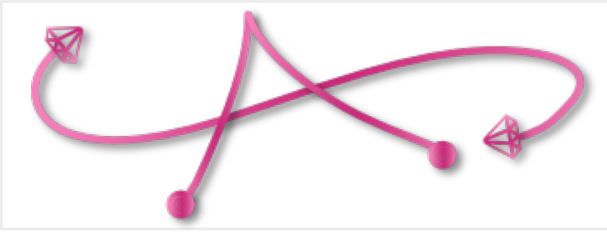
"Holy fuck!" Diana exclaimed as she heard the words come out of David's mouth. "You what?"

"So I guess this is not something you share," David said with obvious tears forming in his eyes. Diana had clearly upset David with her response. "I'm sorry 'Diana', I didn't mean to upset you. I'm just surprised. We talked about something so different this morning. I thought we would be discussing a different kind of future. You know... relative to you and me and the 'roles' we play."

"I knew you'd be upset if I told you I wasn't on the pill anymore. I stopped a couple of weeks ago hoping we could get to this point together, but you were so adamant this morning that I knew this was going to happen," David got out before he dropped his face into his hands and began to cry.

Diana felt stuck in an exceedingly difficult position. She couldn't console David traditionally without risking him going deeper into his new reality. If Diana didn't offer some respite, then she could damage her relationship with David irrevocably. She had to choose carefully.





## Chapter 23 - We Interrupt Your Usual Broadcast For This Important Message

"There, there, *'Diana.'* I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that; let me start over. Starting a family with you would be a dream come true. You're the most important person in the world to me. I want you to have what you want, and we should absolutely talk about this more," Diana said to David as she embraced her husband. David settled down with Diana's apology and comfort. The two stayed hugging while David considered his path forward. He knew he wanted to start a family; it was his most intense and significant desire. He needed to figure out how to proceed now that his *'husband'* had reacted poorly to his initial prompting.

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Later that night, Diana concocted her plan for saving David from himself. Doing some quick research showed that women would switch to a different version of YourEssence when getting pregnant so they didn't interfere with the body's natural processes related to gestation. Typically, YourEssence poses a problem as it may cause damage to fetal cells. It wasn't guaranteed to prevent an egg from implanting, but Doctors recommend cessation of YourEssence treatment when someone tries to get pregnant. Diana would use this information to prevent David from taking her nightly dose of YourEssence, and then in the morning, hopefully, things would be better for David.

Diana sent the article to David's device and asked him to read it. "Oh gosh! I can't believe I didn't know about this. Thanks for sharing this with me."

"Of course. I wanted to show you I'm serious about considering this for us. So when I started researching it, I wanted you to know immediately."

"That means a lot to me that you started researching it for us. I'm sorry I got upset with you earlier."

"I'm sorry, too. You should be starting your ovulation in the next few days, so if you're serious about this, then we should probably stop taking YourEssence right away. Wouldn't want to risk a pregnancy not taking."

"I'm impressed you know my cycle so well! You're right, though. I will skip my dose

tonight and call my Obstetrician tomorrow for the updated doses. One night without YourEssence won't kill me," David said, giddy with the idea of working to become pregnant.

That night, David tried to initiate sex with Diana again, but Diana shut it down. "We don't want to risk getting pregnant while YourEssence is in your system. The gloves come off tomorrow, though. You'll be pregnant by nightfall if I have anything to say about it," Diana exaggerated to appease David's misdirected ambitions. Noticing that her words had created the desired result, Diana felt sorry for David. He was resting so peacefully pressed up against her body. For a split second, she almost considered letting David have what he wanted. *Would it be so bad to maintain the status quo?* Sleep soon arrived, and Diana pondered what the future she would wake to would hold.

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"Holy shit!!! Wake up, wake up, wake up! David, you have to wake up. Something's wrong. Something's very wrong!!!" Diana shouted at David as she shook him to get him to wake up.

"Huh? What's going on? What's wrong?" David said groggily. His voice awkwardly cracked as he said this.

"David, you... You didn't change back. At least not fully. You still look like me! Like Diana, but different. You look like you, too, but a girl version of you. Something's very wrong! This isn't supposed to happen. Oh God, we're going to go to jail. They're going to send us away for abusing YourEssence!" Diana was distraught. Her words were frantic and fast. David couldn't process what she said as he still had morning fog.

"Just hold tight.... Diana. Do you look like... me? Wait... that's not right. I'm not Diana, I'm David. I'm remembering now. I was losing myself, and your memories were taking over. We would stop using YourEssence, and things would hopefully get better. You... hang on. I wanted to keep taking YourEssence. You tricked me into not taking my pill last night by telling me we would try for a baby," David started to cry as his thoughts and memories coalesced into a coherent timeline of the last few days, finally unencumbered by the 'corrective' forces of YourEssence.

Diana went to embrace David, but David turned away as she approached. Diana backed away as David's response indicated he needed some space. Standing there, Diana felt powerless as she reached out to provide comfort, but she soon drew her hand back to not further disrupt David's delicate state.

Diana grabbed some clothes and then left David to himself. Diana was relieved to

wear her regular clothes for the first time in so many weeks. Living as a man had carried many benefits. There was a tremendous relief in being back in her own body. Sitting in a cami and sweats, she hadn't realized how much she had missed her body.

It was an hour later when David finally emerged from the bedroom. He was also wearing a cami but hadn't placed anything on over his legs, leaving his crotch exposed. He appeared to have at least some manner of penis beneath his panties but no sign of his testicles. Further, David seemed to be a chimera of himself and Diana. His breasts were smaller now and his hips narrower, but he still had a noticeably pinched-in waist. His facial features were soft and feminine, but distinctive qualities proclaimed him to be very much a relative of the Martin family. He looked like a sister that David didn't have.

Diana stood up to approach David, but he waved her off. "I'm not ready to be consoled; I just need some coffee." Diana followed David's wishes but couldn't help noticing that David was a mere inch or two taller than she was.

David returned with two cups of coffee as a peace offering. Diana viewed it as a positive sign that David didn't hate her. A few silent moments later. David placed his coffee mug down and said, "We have a lot to talk about."

\*\*\*\*\*

"So, I understand why you did what you did, and I forgive you. I know I wasn't in my right mind. I wasn't even in your right mind. I get that now, so I don't hold you accountable for how you had to handle my craziness."

"Thank you, that means a lot to me, David. I was so scared and confused. I didn't know what to do!"

"I completely understand. Now comes the hard part: we must decide what to do about me."

"What do you mean 'do about you'?"

"Well, you changed back into yourself. I am something else now. Someone else. Going back to our original plan isn't possible anymore," David said as he hung his head in despair.

"I'm sure we can figure something out! Don't give up hope!"

"Don't Diana. I hit the dark web to look up my symptoms. My situation isn't going to get better. It looks like we have two options. The first option is to return to

taking YourEssence, and we make our role reversal permanent."

"That would mean we both become the other person permanently, though. Would we even remember who we were?"

"Based on my experience, no. We wouldn't."

"That's so sad. Don't you think that's sad? To let our real 'selves' die like that?"

"Yes, which leads me to option two. You divorce 'David,' and I go down to a fly-by-night sex change shop and have them finish what YourEssence has done to me. Then I come back and get all my paperwork changed to reflect my new life as a trans woman."

"What?! Why would I leave you?"

"Because I know you, Diana. More so than anyone else on any level. I was you up until last night. I know you are 100% heterosexual. You like men. I can't blame you; I feel like that might be true for me now still, which is just even more reason for you to leave me. It doesn't make sense for two heterosexual women to be married to each other."

"That's ridiculous. You're jumping to conclusions. We don't know anything about our lives or wishes after 3 hours of being in this situation."

"Diana..."

"No, David. I'm not resolving to leave you after three hours. Final answer."

"Heh, you do need to update your pop culture references. That's almost thirty years out of date now."

"What? What are you talking about?"

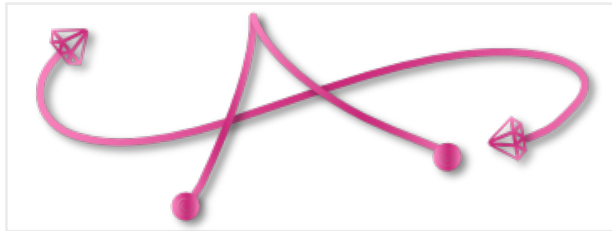
"Carie, she joked that I said something outdated yesterday. She told me to update my lingo. Well, she meant you. Then you just said 'final answer' like that old game show. It made me think of Carie's comment. Sorry, I'm not making things better. I'll let it go..."

Diana was contemplative for a moment before she burst out laughing. "She's so right. I make 'old school' look like a newborn."

"What? You are so ridiculous," David said, visibly releasing the stress of the morning as the humor of the interaction provided relief. Diana came over and

finally embraced David. "We will figure this out. Together, no more talk of leaving each other. Ok?"

"Yeah... okay"



## Chapter 24 - That's Not What I Hear

"You'll have to do it for me; I don't want to raise suspicion," David remarked Monday morning. The weekend had been tough on both of them, but they hadn't landed on any permanent solutions. Diana refused to accept a future where they would separate despite his continued insistence. "Why do you think I forced us into couples counseling?" She said in response each time David tried to convince her that she could just let him go for her happiness. It was a mild appeasement, given how distressing the last week's events had been for David. Still, he couldn't shake the feeling that his best option was retreating to a cave, never to be seen again.

"Yeah, I'll call. It's no problem. Should we say coronavirus? That should be believable as to why you'd be out for so long."

"Better than saying chronic diarrhea."

"Eww, gross, David."

"What? I agree with you."

"Yeah, but you didn't have to go there."

"Hmph, I thought it was funny. Oh well..."

"Shh, it's ringing... Yes, hello. This is Diana Martin. I'm calling to let you know David Martin won't be in today and likely won't be for most of the week... Yes, coronavirus... Yeah, it gets around... I will... I will... Thank you, goodbye," Diana said, ending the call on her device.

"They bought it?"

"Yes, Candice says to get lots of fluids into you. So be sure that you mention that once we get you back on your feet."

"If anything, it would have to be you, Diana. I won't be able to return to being David Martin."

"Are you so sure? You haven't even tried taking your own YourEssence yet. Maybe it will work?"

"Not according to the forum posts I saw."

"It's not like we're working in an area with robust studies. We're already outside the realm of legality here. What extra harm could it do to try it?"

"According to the forum, I could end up crippled. Or otherwise disfigured. They made it sound pretty horrible."

"Crippled? I don't buy it. How would that even work?"

"How does anything YourEssence work? You do recall we turned into **\*identical\*** clones of each other, right? The stuff works on every cell in your body, and as you can see, I'm no longer made up of a single person's cells as it is."

"Right, but I don't understand why your original body's dose would be any worse than continuing to use mine."

"It just is! I don't know why!" David exploded in frustration. Diana decided to back off at this point. David was going through many complex emotions, and Diana's thinking was causing more distress. Diana decided to file that thought away for now.

"I'm sorry, David. I didn't want to upset you; I'll stop."

"Thank you. I know it's hard to accept. We will have to at this point, however. I can't explain the science behind it all."

"I wouldn't expect you to," Diana said, concluding the brief debate. "I've better get going; I can't be late for my job."

"All right, have a good day. Don't forget the notes I took on the new teaching techniques. I wouldn't want Robert to catch you on your first day back."

"Don't worry. I read them all last night. It seems pretty straightforward. I can see

why you liked the training. It's right up my alley. Are you sure you'll be fine here in the apartment alone?"

"Yes, I'll be fine. I'll catch up on daytime television. I'm not going to get in trouble."

"All right, be good. I'll see you tonight."

\*\*\*\*

*Finally, I am alone with my thoughts.*

*Why does she keep pushing me to try 'David's' YourEssence? I don't want to. That's not who I am anymore. Can't she see that?*

*I understand now that she was scared that I thought I was her, but that's not exactly true. I thought my name was Diana, but I wasn't her clone or anything. I was **\*me\***, the female me. It was good, and I was happy with who I was. I was excited about the future—about having a baby...*

*A baby...*

*Me, becoming a mother.*

*Could I see that as my future?*

*Diapers, crying, colic, and all the rest.*

*Breastfeeding...*

*Nurturing, bonding, loving...*

*Grr! Why did she have to trick me like that?! We could have been trying for a baby last night instead of crying over the impossible future we're trying to navigate now.*

*It's all too much. Diana should have left things the way they were. They were better then...*

David was now standing in front of Diana's vanity mirror in the bathroom. Her bottle of YourEssence was in his hand. He was shaking from overstimulation. His thoughts were running wild as he debated taking his future back into his own hands. *She would have no choice but to go back to being David. We can't both take Diana's YourEssence. There aren't enough pills for that. We would get caught. She doesn't want to go to jail!* David thought as he held the YourEssence pill in his hand, ready to down the medication.

"No!!! I can't do this to Diana!" David yelled out as he put the pill down. He was visibly shaking as he stared at his new reflection in the mirror. It was an entirely different person staring back at him. He could see aspects of both 'his' and 'her' face reflecting back. It was the aspects of Diana that felt comforting. *Why do I want to be a woman now all of a sudden?! Why couldn't I go back to being David like Diana wants? It would probably work... take a pill and find out. Grr! No! I can't! I won't!*

\*\*\*\*

"Mmm, smells amazing in here. What are you making?"

"Pozole, it seemed like a good option for tonight."

"Wow, you know how to make Pozole?"

"Well, you do, so yeah, I do now too."

"Right, is there anything about me you didn't absorb?"

"As far as I can tell, no."

"Seriously? Do you remember everything? So you know who kissed Evan out back," Diana started naming an obscure memory of her childhood that had no connection to anything David would have encountered. To Diana's dismay, David finished her sentence, "behind Chuy's restaurant in 8th grade. Yes, it was Claudia."

"Well, it seems I'm at a disadvantage then. I didn't get all of your memories from my time as you," Diana remarked, stunned by David's display of Diana's memories.

"That's all right; it's probably for the best. You know I'm having a tough time here due to what happened to me."

"Yeah, of course... I'm sorry, David."

David recoiled a bit at hearing Diana call him that name. Even just the suggestion of who he was originally led to discomfort. "Dinner's ready though. Buen provecho."

"Provechito," Diana replied hesitantly. *How deeply do my memories run in David?*

"So tell me about your day. Did Robert give you a hard time?" David asked as the two sat down for their meal.



"No! Everything was good today. It was nice being back with my students again. A far cry from the rough and tumble energy of the office environment. I didn't want to punch anyone, so that was good!"

"Why would you want to punch someone? Did something happen at the office?"

"Oh, did I forget to tell you? Your boss came down on me the other day and criticized the deal I had worked up. It made me so mad I almost clocked him on the spot."

"What?! You can't punch Tom. What happened? Tell me you didn't hit him!"

"No, no, I didn't hit him. I wanted to. I really wanted to. My fist was closed and everything, but I stood there and took it. Brian got an earful later over whiskeys, though."

"So that's why you were so drunk the other night."

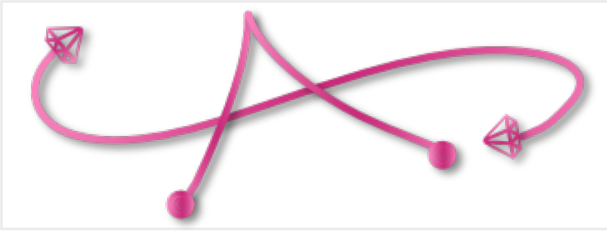
"Yeah, but we're still due a huge bonus check. It should be ready for you when you go back to the office next week."

"You know I can't do that. I can't go in looking like this; they wouldn't even know who I am."

"Right, right. Well, maybe they will mail it then."

"Yeah, maybe."

The couple ate the rest of their dinner in relative silence as the tension between them grew. David couldn't bring himself to admit how he felt for fear of losing Diana. Diana couldn't admit that she knew David was lying about what would happen if he took his own YourEssence. She had looked it up while on break. There were hundreds of cases of residual reversions. All of them cleared up by taking an individual's own YourEssence. Diana couldn't figure out why David was so reluctant to take his YourEssence.



## Chapter 25 - Counseling? No Thank You

**\*New Notification\* Counseling Session Tuesday, 6 pm. Confirm appointment?  
\***

"Oh shit, I forgot about our counseling appointment tomorrow," Diana groaned as she continued to wash the dishes from dinner.

"We will just skip it this week. It's the least of our worries."

"No, we can't skip it. We signed up, and we're going to go."

"How exactly do you propose we do that? Arms extended, ready to have them put shackles on us?"

"Don't be so ridiculous, David. No, we will just have to go as each other one more time. It won't kill us to use YourEssence illicitly again."

"Are you serious? Are you willing to take that risk? What if I don't remember who I am?"

"Well, we will just have to take that chance. You seem to have been doing better these past few days, so I am not that worried. Plus, my mother isn't here to trigger you anymore."

"Uhhh yeah, but I just told you I already have your entire set of memories up here. What else would she have triggered? No, I don't think we should do this. Why is it so important that we don't miss an appointment?"

Diana paused. She knew it would be okay to miss a session, but she wanted to understand David's desires. His apprehension to return to living as himself had piqued Diana's curiosity and fears. "Because I want us to be able to continue our work on repairing our relationship. That's what's important to me, and for whatever reason, Dr. Simms seems to get us talking about our relationship better than we can manage on our own."

"It's that important to you?"

"Yes, it's that important to me."

\*\*\*\*\*

"How was your day at school 'Diana'?" The real Diana asked David.

"Pretty typical. Carrie was her usual gossip self. You won't believe the latest scandal," David started to jump into the story but stopped when Dr. Simms invited them back into her office.

"Welcome back, Martins. You're both looking healthy. How have things been since last week?"

David responded rapidly, "Good, 'David' and I have made great strides since last week. I feel closer to him than I have in months."

"That's amazing, Diana. What do you think led to that?"

"Of all things, a visit from my mother. I know... I know... It sounds implausible, but it's true."

Diana sat and listened in shock. *How can he be so open about this all? Does he lose himself that much in the fantasy that we've constructed?* Diana continued listening as David told a sanitized version of the week's events. He described how he had bonded with Olivia, how it had opened his eyes, and how his 'husband' had been so supportive.

"That sounds wonderful, Diana. I'd like to hear from David now. How did this week feel from your perspective?" Dr. Simms asked as she turned her body towards the person she believed to be David. Dr. Simms continued to take a few more notes as Diana collected her thoughts and set her plan in motion.

"Actually, it's not that great, Mary. I felt a bit ganged up on and like my desires took secondary status to 'Diana's,'" Diana responded as she watched David's face. As expected, he looked shocked and at least a little hurt.

"Oh? That's a surprise. Tell me more. Why are you feeling this way?"

"Well, 'Diana' left some parts out. For starters, Olivia thought I was cheating on her daughter, so she went through all my stuff. That was a huge violation of my privacy, and it doesn't make me feel good to be accused of something so bad. The real frustration is even worse, however. 'Diana' ambushed me at the end of the week with something truly shocking. She just dropped that she wants to start a

family out of nowhere. \*I\* don't get where that comes from. It's never been something she wanted, just something our parents pester us about."

David looked aghast on the couch. The familiar distancing Dr. Simms had noted on the couple's initial visit had returned, as the couple was now as far removed from each other as the couch would allow.

"That does sound like a lot. Diana, what do you have to say in response to David?"

David was looking deeply into Diana's eyes. He had a look on his face that only a married couple could have, which allowed him to convey his question, "Are we really about to do this?" Diana's look back was stoic and firm. That was all the encouragement David needed.

"I thought 'David' understood that \*I\* needed to see some things change. \*I\* want to change, and part of that is that \*I\* want to start a family. I don't think wanting to be a mother is so far-fetched. I had a great mother, and I'd like to use what I've learned to be one too."

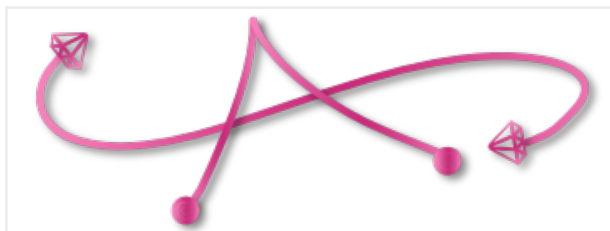
"You say you want to **\*change\*** but what about your more **\*manly\*** qualities? Are you going to abandon those?"

Dr. Simms looked curiously at the person she believed to be David, noting that the question was oddly phrased. Her attention was soon redirected as the response to this question came back.

"This is who \*I\* am. Who I want to be. I like this! If I must give up some things to get that, I accept it. Can you?"

Diana was shocked. David had just confirmed that he preferred to be and stay a woman, and Dr. Simms was furiously scribbling notes on her legal pad. Diana's response was about to shape their respective futures, and she needed to proceed with caution so that she didn't inadvertently alarm Dr. Simms.

"I..."



## Chapter 26 - Catharsis for David

"Yes, I accept you 'Diana,' but I need some time to think about what that future you seek means for me. It's a pretty big change to our whole dynamic. I'm not saying no to kids, but I'm not ready to say yes... yet."

Dr. Simms was furiously scribbling notes as this bombshell unfolded before her. She could hardly believe how quickly it had escalated and was convinced there was more to it than the words being spoken. She couldn't place her finger on it, but she felt like there was some subtext that carried a deeper meaning.

David was cautiously elated. He seemed like he wanted to leap off the couch and prance about in joyous dance, but he wasn't allowing himself to do so, given the tenuous agreement that Diana had acquiesced to. He didn't even know the full extent of what Diana was truthfully agreeing to. Diana wasn't in a position to be entirely forthright after all.

"You mean that? You aren't mad at me for feeling this way?" David finally spoke.

"Yes, I mean it. I didn't say I wasn't mad, however. I still feel pretty upset about how you have treated me since 'your' mother visited. That said, I love you 'Diana.' I'm committed to figuring this out and finding our path together."

\*\*\*\*\*

"I can't believe you! Why did you say those things in front of Dr. Simms!" David launched his judgment at Diana when they were securely sealed in their car.

"What? Me? Did you even hear yourself? You were going on and on about how great everything was. You get so lost when you are in my body!"

"I was pretending! You know, for the doctor?"

"Well, it didn't seem like pretending when you admitted you want to stay living as a woman."

"I said I wanted to change. I didn't say I wanted to live as a woman."

"What do you think it means to become a mother?"

"Well, if that's what we decided, then obviously. I just meant I don't want to be 'David' anymore. I don't feel like I'm that person anymore."

Diana paused. David had just admitted an even bigger truth that needed to be discussed.

"You don't feel like yourself anymore? Or you don't like your old body?"

"Both. I know who I am. I'm me, but that me isn't 'David' anymore. It's hard to explain."

"So, you're saying I'm married to a stranger now?"

"Stranger? What? No, you're still married to me."

"But I don't know who **\*you\*** are anymore. You just told me you aren't 'David,' so who are you then?"

With that, David started to cry. His reality felt so heavy that he could barely handle the discussion's concepts. He still had all his memories of his life as David. So, all the things he had lived and all those experiences were still his, but he also had something more. Something new. Those things merged, combined, and presented themselves with his original self. He was neither David nor Diana, yet he was also both. David did his best to explain this through breaks to collect himself as his emotions weighed heavily. Diana looked on worriedly but also with a glimmer of empathy, allowing David to find the strength to continue.

"I think I get it better now. This is a lot to handle."

"Yeah, I know..."

"Do you remember when we first met? When you told me you were going to marry me?"

"Heh, yeah. I was so full of it. I just wanted to get your attention. I thought earning the attention of someone as beautiful as you would be so amazing."

"Now remember it from my perspective."

"What?"

"You said you had my memories. I want to know if you remember it like I do."

"Umm, ok. Let me think," David closed his eyes and reflected on that night. His memories flowed and felt ephemeral for a moment before they coalesced together. A smile broke across his face, and Diana knew that he was remembering. Before he could speak, Diana leaned in and pressed her lips against David's. The two remained in place as they both relived the memory of their first meeting. As Diana pulled away, they shared an intuition about what the other was thinking.

"Now you know what I felt, and with that kiss, I'm setting us off on the right foot for our **\*new\*** relationship."

"You wanted me to kiss you that night..."

"Yes, I thought you were cute, too."

"And what do you think now?"

"You're a significant person to me, but I need to fully get to know who this new **\*you\*** is before I can decide our future."

"So, you want us to start over?"

"In essence, yes."

"What does that mean exactly?"

"Well, for a little while, it means that we need to find you another apartment."

"What?!"

"If I'm going to stay living as you, then it's only fair that I keep the apartment. It's **\*my\*** salary that pays for it primarily."

"So you want us to stay in each other's bodies?"

"That's up to you. We need both of our incomes to live. That can come from 'David's' job and from 'Diana's' teaching job or another income source that you produce, but we can't just live on one salary."

"So you'd have me become another person?"

"If that's what you think is right for you, then I'll support it as we relearn who we are together."

"When do I have to decide? Are you kicking me out tonight?"

"No, I'm not kicking you out. You can stay with me until we get a place for you, but one of us is sleeping on the couch until then."

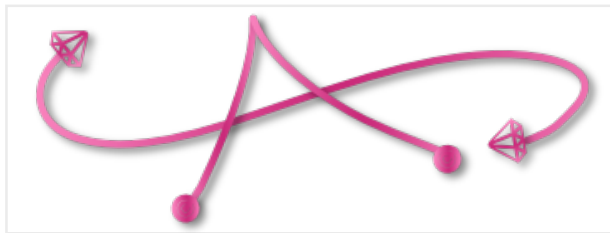
"Fair enough. I guess I'm the one sleeping on the couch."

"Right, you are."

"Yeah, that's a good incentive for me to decide quickly."

"Take your time, but we will follow through once you decide. I'm not willing to leave things unaddressed indefinitely."

"Yeah, of course. I'll decide. I can't afford not to..."



## **Chapter 27 - Choices, Choices, Choices**

"A week goes by fast..." David said to Diana. While David was taking the time to make his choice, Diana reverted to living as her original self. So when David said this, it was to the female version of Diana.

"Yeah! It really does!" Diana replied. She wanted to ask if David had decided what path forward he wanted to pursue. The limbo of the last three days had been challenging.

"I know you're waiting to hear what I've decided about our future. It's not lost on me that this is a huge decision. It's just been tough to make such a big decision. It impacts us both so thoroughly and completely... I don't want to lose you..."

"That's what I want, too! We have to give ourselves the space and time to learn to love the new 'us.' Plus, you'll experience the joys of preparing for a date—heck, a first date even! The excitement, anticipation, and fear—it's all part of it! I know you'll love it, even if it feels worrying now."

"First date? Uhhh..."

"Yeah, we will have our new relationship's first date after you decide what path to take."

"If I choose to have us swap, do we really have to do that? I mean, we would already be married in that configuration anyway."



"Yes, absolutely. I'm not going to deny you this experience. You might not know it yet, but it would be a big point of contention in the future if you didn't live through it yourself."

"I can't really tell the difference in my memories, though; it's all the same to me."

"We'd know the difference. Trust me. It will be great! You have to decide what shape the date takes. All things considered, that's a pretty sweet deal. You get to decide what your new body looks like, and you already have a hot date lined up!"

David felt a bit better after the conversation with Diana. The couple had been distant for the past few days, and it became more apparent to David that Diana was giving him space. She was still committed to him as things stood now, so David just needed to decide what shape his future would take.

He had spent the last few days outside of YourEssence's influences, hoping the right path forward would present itself. Little nagging things were the only clear signs he got, however. Neither his nor Diana's clothes genuinely fit right in his hybrid state. His height was different, and having breasts meant his shirts hung awkwardly on his chest. Diana had no bras in an appropriate band size for David either. David's most persistent thought was that he just wished to get past this decision and move on with his life.

Since the counseling session, David researched YourEssence and UniGlobal and learned about BetterEssence. It would offer him a path to become the woman of his dreams or at least the genetic potential of what his body would have become if he had been born a woman. This was tempting, but it carried significant downsides. He would have to effectively transition socially from male to female. His parents would need to be informed. His work and colleagues. His friends. He also had to wonder whether or not Diana could learn to love this version of him or rather her.

If David suggested that they make their once temporary swap a permanent facet of their lives, those social stresses could be avoided. They would settle into their reversed roles like they had previously done. The only difficulty was that Diana insisted that David move out temporarily while they relearned each other. This would create another kind of stress in their relationships with friends and family. David wondered how Dr. Simms would react to hearing they were living apart or how Diana's work friends would respond. David put this thought aside for the moment as all versions of his future included this point.

The last thing David had to consider was just how pervasive his mind's absorption of Diana's memories had been. He was now fluent in Spanish due to his time as

Diana. He felt a stronger connection to Diana's siblings than to his own. David wondered why the same hadn't happened to Diana.

*Maybe it had? Diana was stoic when she was in my body. Perhaps she is experiencing the same memory changes as I am but is hiding it more. That would be consistent with my behavior. More than it is for Diana. Maybe it's a mix of my mind making her act differently and her not realizing it to be able to raise the concern.* David pondered to himself.

Waking up the following morning, Diana reached over and pulled herself up behind David, embracing him. David wasn't sure at first, but he thought Diana might have been playing with his nipples. It wasn't much attention, and Diana's hand soon came to rest, gently cupping David's breast. David turned his head and saw that Diana was still asleep.

*She's playing with my breasts in her sleep... I've never known Diana to do anything like that. Is she dreaming of having sex with me? A female version of me?*

David rustled and turned onto his back, hoping it would get Diana to notice what she was doing. David could tell how much of his memories and behaviors had been absorbed by Diana based on what she did in response. Instead of turning away and resetting herself, Diana adjusted her position and returned her arm to rest on David's breast.

*Well, that's a signal on its own, isn't it?*

Later that morning, David had prepared coffee for himself and Diana.

"Mmm, that smells good," Diana said as she exited the hallway and entered the living space.

"I poured you a cup. Here you go," David said as he handed the cup to Diana.

"My hero. I was really zonked out. I guess the week took it out of me more than I realized. I had some good dreams, at least," Diana said as she sipped the warm drink.

David knew from first-hand experience what Diana was dreaming and agreed they were almost undoubtedly happy.

Diana sat down on their couch, and David followed suit. David was looking at Diana for signs that she had been affected by YourEssence. Something that would tell him that she would not reject living as David for the rest of her life. Something that could let David feel more sure of his decision. He wanted to stay living as Diana,

and he wanted to stay married to 'David.'

Diana was curled up on the couch with her knees at her chest. Just like David had adopted doing. David was trying to find the courage to share his decision, but Diana was complicating it. David would be robbing Diana of her life, of her body, of her femininity. That seemed like a lot to ask.

Diana put her cup of coffee down and leaned back against the couch, stretching out. David noted how Diana was now acting less like herself. This move was much more a 'David' move. Especially the positioning of her legs with her crotch exposed widely. As Diana returned to sitting upright, she didn't reposition her legs. She was man-spreading on the couch without realizing it.

"So... I've been thinking a lot," David said timidly. It was a small sample size, but David was done waiting. He wanted to get things moving again after the week of limbo.

"Oh, have you decided?" Diana asked as she reached down and aggressively scratched at her crotch.

"Yes, I have," David said, gaining more confidence.

"That's great! Who are we going to become? Boyfriend and girlfriend? Girlfriend and girlfriend?"

"Well, I still wish we could stay as 'husband' and 'wife,' but I've decided within the options you've given me."

"Right, those are the rules! It's better to start the process. So what will it be?"

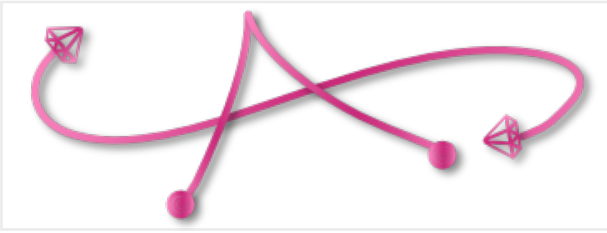
David sat there and looked at Diana deeply. *Is that stubble on her face?* David questioned as he looked at Diana. He shook it off, figuring it was an illusion, and finally summoned the courage to say it. "I think we should swap permanently. I'd much rather date 'David' and live as 'Diana'"

"Great! I figured that was the case," Diana said, standing up. Something was off, however. She suddenly appeared to be much taller than before. She reached behind her back and released her bra. David's suspicion was confirmed as she pulled it from under her shirt. Her breasts were gone, replaced by David's firm pecks.

"You knew? How?"

"I had my suspicions, plus it's what I wanted too. I knew you would figure it out, so

I took a YourEssence when I got up. Now, we can go apartment shopping together. You should take yours so we don't have to wait too late to get started."



## Chapter 28 - You're So Beautiful

"¡Eres tan bonita!" Diana remarked as David exited the hallway.

"Gracias, ¡qué lindo!" David responded as he blushed. He grabbed the sides of his dress and twirled them back and forth a bit before his elation took over, and he did a playful spin, causing his dress to twirl.

"I can tell already that this was the right decision. From now on, I should prepare myself to respond to 'David.' You should do the same for 'Diana,' that is."

David moved over to Diana and pressed his body against hers. He wanted to show her how grateful he was that she was accepting this so readily. Staring into her eyes, David felt the same love and passion for her that he had grown to know over these last few weeks. He tried to lean forward for a kiss, but Diana leaned back.

"Uhh, sorry. We're not at that step yet. We haven't even had our first date."

"Seriously? Maybe we can take a minute first before we jump right in?"

"Nope! These are the rules! Don't worry, I'll ask you out soon."

"Phooey, well, I guess I'll just have to wait. Don't leave me waiting for too long, though!"

"Wouldn't dream of it. Now, should we go check out the first place on our list for today?"

"Sounds good!"

\*\*\*\*\*

"'Diana,' this is Jackeline. She's going to show us the apartments today. I told her we were looking for a two-bedroom and that you would be moving in right away. I'll

stay behind while I get our old apartment cleared out."

David looked at Diana, a bit confused, but Diana gave the "go along with it" glance, and David decided to roll with it.

"Yes! We're very excited to be apartment hunting."

"Well, I'm delighted to be able to show you some places today. These are all part of my company's buildings, so if you have any specific questions, don't hesitate to ask. I should have answers or be able to get you an answer quickly," Jackeline said to the couple. Diana had informed Jackeline that they wanted a new apartment to expand their family. Diana didn't want to explain this detail to David at this point. She hoped that her explanation would be enough to convince David.

"So, this first apartment is on the fifth floor: two bedrooms, one with an en-suite and a second guest bathroom off the main living space. There's a bonus room that can be used as a small office or a playroom," Jackeline introduced the first apartment as they walked into the empty apartment. Diana glared at Jackeline as she said playroom, but the gesture was lost on her.

"I like how bright it is! I could see 'us' here," David said nearly instantly.

"Well, the important part is if you could see 'you' here. Don't forget you'll be on your own for a while," Diana responded, trying to temper the enthusiasm.

"Oooh! 'David!' This is so cute! Don't you love the color!" David called out as he checked out the second bedroom.

"It's very yellow. You like it?"

"It's so cute for a little girl. Or even for a boy. It would save time painting for later," David replied gleefully.

Diana's fear was realized as David had reached a logical but inconvenient conclusion. "Let's not get ahead of ourselves, 'Diana'; we still have a whole courtship to get through," Diana whispered to David quietly so she wouldn't raise suspicions.

"Yeah, yeah. All right. I'll file this away as a mental note for later."

"Well? What do you both think?"

"I like the en-suite. It's a good size, and the shower looks high-end," Diana replied.

"Well, I love it. If it were up to me, I'd take this place right now," David answered.

"We have two more places to see," Diana responded.

"David's right. It doesn't hurt to see the other locations. I hand-selected these places for you both. I know you'll like them all," Jackeline said, agreeing with Diana.

"Don't be surprised when I say this was my favorite at the end of the day. That's all I'll say!" David replied.

"If that's the case, we will apply for this apartment. I don't think Jackeline would let someone else rent it from under us."

"Of course! I've been clear that these places are being viewed today. No one else would dare rent them without talking to me first," Jackeline affirmed Diana's claim.

"That's a relief. All right, on to the next location, then?"

"Let's!" Diana and Jackeline accidentally replied in unison.

\*\*\*\*\*

"I can't believe that place had a second level. I've never seen an apartment with two floors before," David remarked after they exited the second apartment.

"It's city living with a flare. It's supposed to feel like a townhouse, but the apartment building has multiple units all like this," Jackeline remarked.

"Oh, that's so interesting. It did feel very homey," David continued the conversation before noticing that Diana was quiet. "What do you think 'David'?"

"I loved how much living space there was. I worry about having the stairs. It seems like a lot of up and down," Diana remarked.

"That's fair. Good for the glutes, though!" David joked as he ran his hands along his dress, emphasizing the curve of his backside. David hoped Diana would catch his gesture and was excited to see it had created the reaction he had hoped for. Diana clearly adjusted her stance to allow her growing member to move more freely. David chuckled internally as the three made their way downstairs to the next apartment.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Oh my goodness! Is this a Spanish villa? The courtyard is so cute!" David remarked, practically gushing in enthusiasm. "It reminds me of the home I grew up in!"

"I thought you might like this one," Diana remarked.

"Because you know me so well! Oh, 'David, ' you're amazing. I can't wait to see it!"

"So, this is another two-bedroom, but only one bathroom. That's the downside of this location," Jackeline introduced the apartment as they walked into the entrance.

"Oh, small kitchen too," David remarked as the first entered.

"Nice high ceilings, though," Diana countered.

The group walked through the apartment and noted its distinguishing features. When they met back in the living space, Jackeline popped the big question.

"Well, these are all the places today. Do we have a winner?"

"It's mostly your call 'Diana.' I'll be happy with any of them," Diana answered, directing everyone's attention to David.

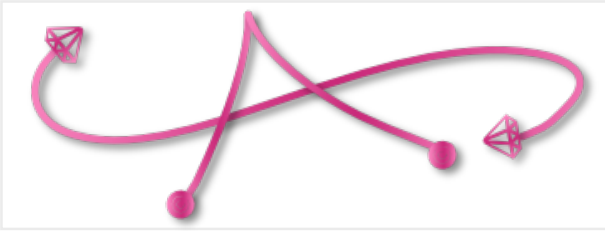
"I should have known you'd say that," David sighed. He had suspected that Diana might put this decision on him. It was a big decision, and David had hoped for some support.

"Don't you think you should at least rank them for me? What if I pick the one you liked the least?" David asked, hoping to undermine Diana's tactic.

"Nope, they are all top choices in my book. We can't go wrong no matter which one you choose," he grinned as he let this statement out.

David crossed his arms over his chest in protest, but he could tell from Diana's posture that his mini-protest would not work.

"Fine, if I get to decide on my own, then I think the one I will go with is..."



## Chapter 29 - You're on your own

***Reader's note: David's and Diana's pronouns have switched to she/her and he/him, respectively.***

*'David' wasn't kidding about this whole moving out on my own thing. I'm glad he let me pick which place to move into. I'm even more pleased that I chose a place close to my work and still relatively close to our old apartment. I can't imagine how much harder my life would have been these past two weeks if I had to drive an extra twenty minutes every trip back and forth between the two apartments. Let alone doing that on top of a longer work commute, David thought to herself as she continued the seemingly unending task of unpacking boxes of clothes, books, kitchen appliances, and cleaning supplies. Every corner of the apartment had another stack at least three high for her to navigate. Diana had insisted that the vast majority of their shared possessions be moved. He was, as he put it, "living the bachelor life" and thus did not need all of the accompanying possessions.*

David had accepted this answer at the time, but she felt sure it was a further sign that Diana would cave quickly on this 'dating each other' phase and promptly return to living together. It had been hard on David to pack up her things and leave Diana's as they were. A few times, she caught herself starting to pack Diana's things and realized that he wasn't making the move with her. This left her melancholy at times, amplified by the fact that David found Diana attractive. It was another reminder of how Diana had felt those months ago when he forced David to attend counseling. *If I had known this was how Diana felt, I would have straightened my act up. Sigh...*

The first night on her own in her new apartment was lonely. She reached to Diana's side of the bed to feel for him and kept coming up empty-handed. Thinking back, it had been years since David had lived independently, and an extra week of YourEssence had made it more difficult for David to distinguish 'his' memories from Diana's. So when she tried to remember the last time she lived alone, a memory of Diana popped up. She had been living back home with her parents, over an hour away from the city. 'David' had invited her to dinner after they met at a party. David could remember how 'David' had approached her. *He thought he was so cool. I was way out of his league, but there's no denying he was fit. That pickup line was so ridiculous. Saying he was going to marry me someday. I can't*



*believe I let that slide; it was so corny and forward. Will he try and do something like that again now that we're dating?*

David reflected on her memories. Dinner had been enjoyable but fairly ordinary. The thing that had impressed Diana into giving David another date was the fact that he actually listened to what she said. So many guys paid such superficial attention to her when on a date. That was fine for one-night stands, but as a recent college graduate, she needed someone to take her seriously and be interested in something meaningful—something long-term.

David grabbed her phone. *Hmm, no notifications. I guess 'David' is doing fine on his own. Is it too desperate to text him that I miss him?* David wondered to herself. David wrote a half dozen messages one at a time before deleting them. She couldn't press the issue so soon. She needed to listen to Diana's suggestions and follow through with this arrangement. David had to admit that she was excited to be courted by Diana. It would be a shame to have missed out on that part of their relationship if they had just agreed to skip over it and maintain things as they were.

*Carie will understand. I'll explain it to her, and she'll listen to me,* David thought as she typed out a message to Carie. The faint light of her phone was the only light in the room as David waited anxiously for Carie to respond.

"Oh, God, Diana. I'm so sorry! He was always a pushy asshole. Maybe this separation will be good for you. There are plenty of fish in the sea!"

David read Carie's response. *Shit, maybe I explained it poorly. Now Carie thinks I'm leaving 'David.' I'll have to fix this quickly,* David thought as she typed out her response.

"Oh, we're not at that stage yet! It's a trial thing to give each other space to 'be ourselves.' I don't want to leave him, and I don't think he wants that either."

After another few minutes of anxiously waiting, David's phone beeped with a notification.

"Oh, well, maybe this will be good for you both. A bit unconventional, but I'm guessing your counselor knows all about this and is supportive."

"We haven't told her yet..."

"Shit, are you sure this is going to work out for the best?"

"'David' really thinks so. I want to believe him. I miss having him here with me,

though."

**\*\* Meanwhile, at Diana's Apartment \*\***

"Why can't I sleep? Ugh, this is so frustrating!" Diana said out loud to no one in particular. As Diana scanned the bedroom, he noticed the distinct absence of several familiar objects. His dresser was moved with David; he had said it made more sense for her to keep it with her, but now the bedroom seemed oddly empty. His stacks of clothes in the corner didn't help the room feel very homey. Getting up, Diana trodded over to his en-suite, hoping that he could reset for the evening with a quick shower.

The warm water pouring over his body provided momentary relief, but his thoughts soon drifted. Diana had enjoyed his time living as David before they made the call to swap places permanently. Now, seeing his body in the shower, the permanence of that decision finally set in. He had a dick. A rather large one at that. He also had a substantial amount of body hair. It covered his chest's pectorals and formed a tidy line heading towards his crotch. Diana couldn't dismiss one of his best assets, however. David had always taken good care of himself, frequently visiting the gym. It showed the most in his abdominals. Standing there, Diana flexed his abdomen and watched as the individual muscles flexed, making themselves visible beneath the hair and skin. The visible six-pack was very appealing and gave him a sense of pride. The memory of 'Diana' running her fingers down his body and bouncing over the ridges had him feeling instantly horny.

*There's that familiar feeling again. It really does have a mind of its own, Diana thought as his penis quickly became erect. Diana's thoughts of 'Diana' soon turned to more steamy memories as he remembered the curves of her body and the ways that he enjoyed making love to her. I wonder if she's thinking about me right now,* Diana thought as he worked his hand along the length of his member.

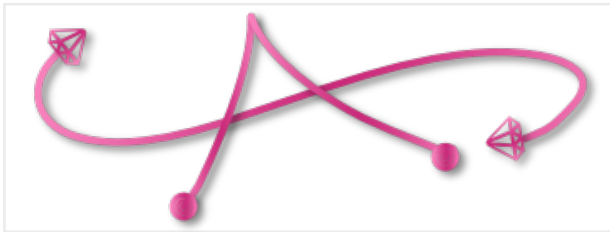
Diana finished his ministrations quickly and lamented that masturbation was not as fulfilling as having sex. An errant thought of playing with 'her' clitoris bounced into his mind as he remembered his life as Diana momentarily. *There is no denying that was good; this is good, too. Just different.* Finally feeling somewhat satiated, Diana tried to go back to sleep. The freedom to throw a pair of boxers on and not have to dry his hair for thirty minutes was a great relief.

Lying on his bed, he spread himself out as big as he could. The cool air from sleeping over the covers provided some further comfort. His body ran much hotter than before, so the ability to cool off was essential to his ability to get a good night's sleep. Despite tossing and turning to find a comfortable position, Diana was soon drifting off to sleep, his mind finally able to put his worries away for another time.

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Diana woke the following day and turned his attention to the calendar in his kitchen. It was the one possession of 'Diana's' that he insisted on staying with him. David had relented but told Diana she would buy a new one for her apartment. It was decidedly antiquated for the 2060s, but Diana had always found comfort in working off a physical calendar. That trait appears to have remained with him in his new body.

While looking through the calendar pages, Diana's thoughts processed through the steps of his plan to ask David out for their first date. *All right, today is the 6th. Let's map this out. I should ask 'Diana' out on this day. That will allow me some time to prepare, which will give 'Diana' time to reset her expectations and experience the feelings of going on a first date. The question is if that's enough time. I don't want her to think this is a foregone conclusion. We need to do this right. If I wait too long, she might think I'm playing the field or not interested in her anymore, and then I'll ruin our chances of being happy together... All right, I think I've got it. I'll wait...*



### Chapter 30 - Day 1 starts, The new 'Diana'

***Reader's note: For clarity, the characters will now be referred to by their respective body's names, not their original names. They will refer to each other and themselves with these names accordingly. References to Diana mean the individual who started as David and vice versa.***

Diana, formerly David, tossed restlessly in bed. She had turned her alarm off after it had gone off the first time at 5:30. "I haven't slept a wink, ugh. What time is it?"

Diana's phone responded, announcing the time: "It's 6:36 a.m. To reach your work destination on time, you must leave by 7:02 a.m. this morning."

"Shit! I barely have enough time to shower. I guess I'm not washing my hair today," Diana said as she rushed to get the water running for her shower. *I'm going to have to rush through all of my usual routine. God, I'm so tired...*

"This was easier when I had David's body. God... Men don't know how easy they have it," Diana cursed as she ran a razor blade over the stubble that had come in on her legs. "Why does this always happen to me? I get settled, and then I mess some details up. I wish I had gotten some actual sleep last night. Ouch! Shit, did I just cut myself!?" Diana grumbled as she finished shaving her legs and armpits. Quickly rushing to towel herself dry, she inspected her leg to see how severe her cut was. "Just a nick. That'll heal up fine. On to more pressing matters." Diana worked quickly to apply her foundation. A touch of blush on her cheeks and a light application of eye shadow followed by eyeliner. Using her blending sponge, she worked the makeup as expeditiously as she could manage—the sponge serving double duty as she cleaned up her eyeliner as a final step.

"Looks good enough for the university students. I hope Robert doesn't come by today. Or Carie... what are the odds of that after what I messaged her last night? Exactly zero. Shit, no time for talking to myself."

Diana rushed over to pull on her stockings. She rapidly rolled up the sheer fabric to the toe and delicately placed her foot in. She repeated this on the other side and gently slid the fabric up her freshly smooth legs. In an instant, she was zipping up the zipper on her dress and throwing a button-up blouse on over her bra. "Stupid buttons, why do there need to be so many of these?" she complained. "What time is it?"

"It's 6:58 am. Should I prepare your car for on-time departure?"

"Yes!" Diana shouted back at her phone before dashing towards the closet to grab her heels. Bouncing on one foot as she placed her heel into the shoe before switching to the other, she made her way to the door. "7 o'clock, I gotta get going. I guess I'll just have to drink the work sludge they call coffee. Damn," Diana said as she shut her new apartment's front door.

\*\*\*\*

"Good morning, Diana!" Carie greeted Diana as she stepped into the teacher's lounge. Diana simply grunted, acknowledging Carie, and went straight to the coffee maker. Carie didn't know how rushed Diana's morning had been, but she knew she needed to offer comfort to her friend.

"Are you doing all right today?" Carie asked.

"Yeah, I just had a rushed morning. Some coffee will make it better."

"I'm sure it will, but I meant, are you okay after dealing with your living situation for

a whole night?" Carie cut straight to the point.

"Umm, yeah. Look, I don't have time to talk about it right now. We can catch up over lunch. Yes, let's have lunch together. That will work," Diana responded, appearing to hold both sides of the conversation on her own. Carie worried about Diana's rapid response and demeanor.

"Yes, lunch will work, sweetie, but you know I'm here for you, right?"

"Yes. Of course. I don't know what I'd do without you, Carie. Thanks for everything," Diana responded, furthering the one-sided conversation. She uttered the last word as she exited the lounge.

"What's with her today?" Janet asked, appearing worried.

"Oh, you won't believe it. It's so scandalous," Carie's gossip tendencies overtook her as she was asked about Diana.

"Do I want to know? I like Diana and don't want anything bad to happen to her..." Janet responded, looking increasingly concerned.

"It's her marriage. They're in a trial separation, and she's not happy about it."

"Oh my God. The poor thing. She must be so upset!"

"Yeah, she was worried about it last night when she told me."

"Should you be telling other people about it? It seems kind of private?"

"We're all friends here, plus I know we're all team Diana. David can go walk off a cliff for all I care."

The two women continued gabbing as Frank slid out of the lounge, having noted their conversation.

\*\*\*\*

"Oh, Robert, how nice to see you today," Diana remarked as Robert entered her lecture.

"Hello, Mrs. Martin. I'm just here to observe today. Pay me no attention," Robert said as he went to the back of the lecture hall.

"Continuing, can anyone tell me the six tenses of Latin?" Diana asked her class.

A few students in the front of the class raised their hands quickly, but Diana wanted to try out one of the new techniques she had learned from Robert's training. "Actually, why don't we try something different. Class, why don't we start at the front of each row and send the answer back one at a time to the student behind you? Once we get the answers to the back of the class, then we will check to see if we all got it right."

Diana's students dutifully performed the task, sending the answer back one at a time until everyone transferred the information to the back of the room.

"All right, let's check our answers. Let's start with this row, Jonathan. What tenses did you end up with?"

"Present, past, future, perfect, past perfect, and future perfect," Jonathan answered incorrectly.

"Cringe!" Tobey shouted out from across the room.

"Hey, that's uncalled for. I'd like you to step outside while we help Jonathan."

All the while, Robert was observing this interaction unfold. He kept quiet, but Diana was secretly terrified of how her teaching would be judged. As she explained the proper tenses caringly to Jonathan, the class session time elapsed. "All right, everyone, I'll see you back here for our afternoon session. Don't be late. We've got a lot more topics to cover!" Diana ducked her head from the lecture hall and saw that Tobey had already chosen to excuse himself to lunch. Robert stopped by her lectern as Diana gathered her things to go to the lounge for lunch with Carie.

"I think you handled that very well. The exercise didn't work this time, but you demonstrated good adaptation and empathy for your student. Nice work, Mrs. Martin," he said as he exited the lecture hall. Diana was elated; Robert was old-fashioned and always used last names when he felt a high degree of respect for someone. As Diana made her way to the professor's lounge, she caught Frank looking at her with a curious expression. *Is he checking me out?* Diana wondered as she continued on her way to meet Carie.

Sitting down with her salad, Diana told Carie what happened in her class with Robert. Carie was short in all of her responses, however. She obviously wanted to talk about Diana's more pressing and personal issue. "Alright... Ask, what do you want to know?" Diana finally relented.

"When did you decide this? How long will it last? Was it really David's idea? Do you

think he's cheating on you? Are you cheating on him?" Carie gasped for air after hurriedly asking all these questions in one breath.

"We decided a week ago. We went apartment hunting together and decided to go forward with it because it would be good for us both. I'm not sure how long it will last. David isn't buying new furniture or anything. So, I don't think he expects it to last long. It was David's idea, in any case. I think you asked that. What else did you ask? Oh... Yeah, are we cheating on each other? Thanks for thinking the worst of us, but to my knowledge, neither of us is cheating."

"Sorry, Diana, but people are wondering why you'd do this. Cheating just seemed like a reasonable answer," Carie responded with some degree of remorse. Her response had exposed another problem for Diana, however.

"What do you mean 'people' are wondering? You are the only person who knows about this, right?"

"Well, I had to tell Janet. She overheard us this morning; you know how she deals with change. She doesn't, so I had to smooth things over. It's all okay, though. I'm sure she won't tell anyone."

Diana felt frazzled. She should have known better than to tell the school gossip. She thought Carie would be a better friend than that. Is that why Frank leered at me? Does he think I'm romantically available now? Eww, gross. Diana's thoughts wandered back to the odd interaction in the hallway.

"Well, please don't tell anyone else. This is not a big deal. I don't want people worrying about it, and I'm not worried about it. In fact, we're seeing our counselor tomorrow, and we will let her know about it then. I'm sure it will all work out fine, and we will get her blessing that we're doing the mature and responsible thing. So, please, no more discussion over my marriage. Okay?"

"Yes, of course! I'd never betray your request, Diana. I'm sorry that I said anything at all."

"Thank you, Carie, I appreciate it."

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As Diana redirected her attention to her salad, she had just enough time to take two bites before her alarm to head to her following lecture went off. Diana now had three minutes to return to her class and had the odious responsibility of disciplining Tobey. She had dealt with troublemakers before, but Tobey took the top spot for the most annoying ones to deal with. Everything was "cringe," or

someone else acted like an “NPC” to Tobey. There was little common ground that could be established.

Diana worked up her mettle. She needed to be mentally prepared for this interaction. At least Robert would understand what had happened if she needed to send Tobey to receive further disciplinary action. As Diana walked into her lecture hall, the students were at their typical rambunctious level.

“All right, everyone, in your seats. Tobey, I need to speak with you for a moment. Stephen, please lead the class in reading chapter 13 of your book. We will discuss Napoleon’s ambitions and his historical influence on literature when I return,” Diana directed her class. Despite the loud classroom environment, She knew she could press forward with her words. Counting on a good student like Stephen to keep things on track was a benefit. Tobey should have been solemn in his march to the front of the lecture hall as he knew he was in trouble, but instead, he maintained his flamboyant attitude, making rude gestures and distracting the other students as he slowly made his way forward.

“Tobey, you know we’ve talked about your disruptions in class before. Why are you so insistent on treating other people this poorly?” Diana asked though she knew the answer: Tobey did it because he wanted attention.

“Because it’s funny. I wouldn’t do it as much if you didn’t set me up so well,” Tobey responded as defiantly and resolutely as Diana expected.

“So it’s my fault that you insult your peers? That’s an unlikely story. Do you want to try again?”

“Nope, just give me a demerit. I’m over this.”

“A demerit is a guarantee. I think we need some more meaningful intervention, however. Maybe a parent-teacher call will get your attention?” Diana said it like a question, but it was already a foregone conclusion in her mind.

“Like they’ll care,” Tobey responded.

“I think they’ll care a lot when I tell them you might flunk another course until you can demonstrate the emotional maturity needed to advance.”

“You’d fail me for that? You can’t do that,” Tobey started off scared but quickly changed his phrasing to show his defiance.

“I can; it’s as simple as that, Tobey. Now, are you going to behave for our history lesson today? Or should I send you to speak with Robert right now?”



"You should send me. I'm not taking your crap anymore," Tobey dug his heels in as his response came out venomously.

"All right, you know the way. Start marching," Diana said as she stuck her hand out, pointing towards Robert's office.

The two walked in silence as Tobey continued his defiant demeanor. Diana was sure he thought he was untouchable and entirely immune to punishment. She secretly hoped that Robert would punish Tobey as he would his teachers who failed to meet his expectations.

"Robert, I've got a discipline case for you. Tobey is continuing to disrupt the classroom learning environment. Can I leave him with you?"

"Yes, thank you, Diana. Tobey, please take a seat," Robert stood up, creating an imposing presence that Diana knew would cause her student some fear, though she also knew that Robert would never truly hurt anyone. Tobey sat down in the chair Robert had guided him to and immediately dropped his head. Diana thought he might look back as she left him, but Tobey did not attempt to.

Diana returned to her class and stood just outside her classroom door. She took a quick moment to straighten her dress and fix her hair. Pulling loose strands behind her ear and tucking them there, Diana momentarily felt strangely out of place. She had been so willing to support her troublemaker, but he gave her no room to work with him. It was oddly familiar and yet distant. As she took a deep breath, she remembered a time in David's memories when a teacher scolded him. The interaction had gone similarly poorly, with David being sent to the Principal's office. *I haven't remembered that encounter for a long time. Feels like a lifetime removed. I guess it is now that I'm Diana. Why are boys so willing to be so obstinate? I hope I have girls. I don't want to deal with the problems of having boys. Hopefully... someday...* Diana's thoughts drifted off into wishful thinking before she regained her composure and stepped back into her class, ready to conclude her lesson.

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Settling back in at her apartment, Diana kicked her heels off her feet, letting them rest haphazardly near her shoe rack. She would deal with storing them neatly later. *What a day! The hits kept coming; I barely had a minute to peace all day between Carrie and Tobey.* Diana proceeded to let her skirt fall off her hips as she unzipped the zipper. Frustrated that she had worn stockings, she hurriedly tugged the fabric down and kicked her legs as hard as possible to get the material to release from her feet. Finally, down to her undergarments, she collapsed onto her couch. Lifting

her left foot atop her right knee, Diana massaged her foot, which felt knotted up from the extra tension in her body throughout the day. *I wish David were here to help work these knots out. It was my first day on my own after getting moved, and I already wished he was here. I hope he doesn't plan on waiting too long before he asks me out. I'm ready for this show to start,* Diana thought to herself as she pressed her thumbs firmly into the soles of her sore feet. *I'm glad my ass looks as good as it does in heels. Otherwise, I'd throw all of them out in the trash... Then again, a new pair of Jimmy Choo heels are just divine to slip into. After a few dates, I'll have to let David know which ones interest me. Maybe he'll know already... that will be interesting to see how that works out.*

Diana finished massaging her feet and decided to go with a classic lazy girl dinner: banana oatmeal. Diana placed a half cup of oats into a bowl, poured some water into the bowl, and added some soy milk and a dash of cinnamon and vanilla extract. Into the microwave for two and a half minutes, and she would be good to go. As the microwave worked, Diana cut a banana into slices so she could top her oatmeal and be done cooking.

The microwave's beeping, indicating it had finished, was overlapped by the sound of Diana's phone ringing. *That'll be David. I knew he couldn't wait more than a day... Oh, oh! Kaitlyn is calling. I haven't talked to her in ages.* Diana's mind pivoted quickly as she saw who was calling. Kaitlyn was one of Diana's closest friends in college. They hadn't talked as much recently now that they were both busy with work and life.

"Kaitlyn!!!!" Diana answered her phone, practically squealing in delight. "What is going on?!"

"Diana!!! Oh my God. I'm so excited to hear your voice! It's been too long."

"Don't I know it! You're so awesome for calling!"

"Well, we needed to dish and get caught up. I've got some news."

"Oooo, tell me, tell me. What's your news?"

"Well, you know things have been going good with my job. I got a promotion, and I'm that boss ass bitch now!"

"Oh my God, Kate! You are the boss now?! That's so exciting!!!"

"Yeah! I got a big raise, and now I know how much everyone makes. I used that info to get an immediate adjustment, too! They aren't going to hold this lady down!"

"You're so awesome, Kate; I wish I had that courage. You're an inspiration!"

"That's not all...," Kaitlyn said with excitement. Diana could hardly wait to hear her friend's further news...

"What else could there be? You've got to be one of the youngest bosses at your company."

"Youngest by three years, but that's not what I wanted to tell you."

"Well... dish. What else do you got?"

"Our family duo is going to be a trio in about five months!"

"What?! Holy shit! Kate! You're going to be a mommy! You must be so excited!"

"We're very excited! You should see how Marcus is making all these repairs around the townhouse. Our place will be the safest home within a twenty-mile radius."

"Wow, that's so wonderful. I bet you're glowing already. How has the first trimester been for you?"

"Oh, well, for me, it's been a breeze. Though, I should tell you that we hired a surrogate. My job is too busy to go through a pregnancy right now."

"Oh! Well, that's still awesome news. I'm so happy for you!"

"Thanks, Diana. I couldn't hardly stand waiting to tell you. The doctors said it would be best to wait until twenty weeks. Sixteen seemed good enough between best friends."

"I am glad you told me! I'm a bit jealous," Diana said, wiping a tear of joy and sadness from her cheek.

"Jealous? I thought you were resolved to wait until forty before you had kids. I feel like you said that on numerous occasions."

"Well, some things have changed for me recently. I realized I wanted to get started sooner rather than later."

"Wow! That's a big step. How does David feel about that? I mean, he must be over the moon."

"Yeah... we're actually not quite there yet."

"Okay... I know that tone. You're not telling me everything. What's going on?"

Diana audibly sighed and took a deep breath before she started, "You know me too well—better than I know myself even... David and I are temporarily separated. We're in counseling, though, so I think we can work through this tough patch."

"Di, you should have told me. I would be there to support you! I should be there now," Kaitlyn's voice faded out a bit as Diana heard Kaitlyn continue, "Marcus! I need to take the car! Diana needs me... No, it is an emergency... No, no one is hurt... No, you can't come with me. Marcus! Let it go. I'll be back when I'm back!"

Diana listened as Kaitlyn had this side conversation with her husband. Finally, Kaitlyn returned on the line fully, "Where are you staying? Send me the address, and I'll be there straight away. We are going to do some serious girl talk," Kaitlyn instructed Diana. As she was saying this, Diana tried to interject. However, Kaitlyn did know Diana very well, so she instantly shut down Diana's objections, responding, "No objections, Di, you will see me as fast as traffic allows. Now send me that address!"

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Diana knew she had about an hour before Kaitlyn would reach her apartment. Traffic at this time of day would be dreadful—*one of the fringe benefits of being a teacher. I can leave before rush hour falls over the city*, Diana thought to herself. Diana's anxious energy was building up as she paced back and forth across the length of her living room. She needed to do something to avoid stewing in her own dread. She knew Kaitlyn would press her on every aspect of what was happening between her and David. *Just my luck, I have to explain this situation twice in one day. The tricky part is that Kaitlyn won't have the same boundaries Carrie has with me as a work friend. I need to do something rather than just fret here in isolation*, Diana thought as she started to form an idea.

"Running! I'll run on the treadmill in the building's gym for thirty minutes. That will take my mind off all of this," Diana triumphantly announced to her empty apartment. Breaking the silence helped her feel better about the idea. She hadn't realized how quiet the apartment felt before. *I just need to get changed first. Let's see, sports bra, that's a check. I unpacked those yesterday into my dresser. Now the harder question is, do I want to run in athletic tights or shorts? 'Diana' was also fond of the tights, but I feel like shorts are the right call*; Diana's thoughts worked quickly as she took near-immediate action along with her decisions. "How do I look?" Diana asked herself as she looked over her attire. The tank top she chose

hung loosely on her shoulders, exposing her sports bra and providing ample cooling opportunity. "Pretty all right if I do say so myself," Diana answered her own question as she admired the curve of her backside in the short shorts she was now wearing. "Extra glad I chose to shave this morning, too."

Diana used her personal device to unlock the gym door, but only one other tenant was there. A man who appeared to be in his late forties, maybe early fifties, was using a rowing machine. He briefly stopped his workout and turned his attention to Diana. He offered a simple smile and head nod in acknowledgment and then returned to his workout. Diana was glad he hadn't gotten up; she didn't have first-hand experience turning down a stranger's advances. Reflecting, she realized how sheltered her time as a woman had been. On the one hand, she was glad for it, but her memories of batting away men's advances told her another story of what her reality had become.

Diana set a towel over the bench beside a treadmill and stepped onto the device. She knew she averaged about a nine-minute mile, but that number felt too leisurely for this version of Diana. When she was David, she pushed herself to reach seven-minute miles and was very proud of her physical fitness accomplishments. Feeling emboldened, Diana set the treadmill to a seven-minute mile and started running. The experience wasn't entirely foreign, but Diana could tell that there were some substantial differences in the experience of running as a woman versus the experience as a man. The most obvious was the jiggle and wobble of her breasts. While the sports bra seemed to be restraining more substantial shifting, there was only so much the fabric could do to keep things in place. Furthermore, her gait while running was now altered. There was a different shifting of weight from side to side that was unfamiliar and led to Diana slowing the treadmill's pace so she could adjust to it more effectively.

After a half mile, Diana was finally feeling in the groove. She turned up the music on her personal device, which sent conductive waves directly to her eardrums. With the music playing, her body in sync with it, Diana decided it was time to push herself. She dialed the pace back up to seven minutes. She almost immediately felt the extra fatigue and burn as she pushed herself. She soon realized how much she was sweating as a bead of sweat dropped from her forehead onto the treadmill console. *No pain, no gain, they say. I'm going to finish this mile if it kills me,* Diana resolved as she tried to focus on the music playing over the aches she felt in her thighs and calves.

"Phew!" Diana said audibly as she closed out the mile. Her pace ended in the mid-8-minute range, and she practically squealed in delight. *Yes! I did it!* she excitedly thought as she reduced the treadmill's pace to split the difference between her standard pace and the pace 'David' was used to.

The following two miles felt like a breeze comparatively as Diana closed out her run. As she stepped off the treadmill, she was glistening with sweat all over her face and chest. She quickly grabbed her towel to clean herself and the treadmill off when she was startled by a touch on her shoulder. "Eek!" she screeched in response to the unexpected touch. Turning around quickly, she saw the middle-aged man standing there looking shocked.

"Gosh, I didn't mean to startle you. I just wanted to welcome you to the building. You moved in on five this weekend, right? My name is Jerry. I live on three. It's nice to meet another gym rat," the man said, extending his hand to Diana.

Diana cautiously shook his hand as she held her towel to her chest. "Nice to meet you as well. My name's Diana," she said in an amenable but not overly pleasant tone.

Jerry wasted no time in advancing his mission. "I know this is forward of me, but maybe you'd like to join me for a drink sometime? Or coffee if that's more your style?"

"Oh... ummm," Diana froze a bit as she encountered her first-ever come-on by another man. She felt vulnerable in this closed-off space. There was no one around to hear her if this man's reaction to her rejection became violent or aggressive. Diana's mind searched for a polite and gentle response. "That's very kind of you to offer, but I'm actually married. I'm sorry I left my ring upstairs," she said, hoping this would suffice.

"Oh? I thought you moved in alone. I'm so sorry to have assumed. Of course, someone as beautiful as you would be committed to another. Well, maybe I'll see you both in the gym sometime. Welcome to the building!" Jerry responded as he turned to leave the gym.

*Phew! I can't believe how tense that was! Thank goodness he accepted my answer. Maybe choosing to become Diana wasn't all sunshine and rainbows, after all. That was pretty terrifying; Diana's thoughts raced along with her heartbeat. Toweling her face and forehead off one more time, Diana was reeling from the interaction. As she was standing there in a fog, her personal device alerted her that she had fifteen minutes until Kaitlyn should be arriving. *Shit, I need to get a quick shower in and get dressed. Shake it off, Diana; it's going to keep happening. I traded in my maleness for this...**

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"Kaitlyn!!!" Diana squealed in excitement as she opened the door to her apartment.

Standing in the doorway was her college friend holding a bottle of white wine, a box of tissues, and a heart-shaped box of chocolates. Kaitlyn reciprocated Diana's welcome as she stepped into the apartment. Kaitlyn's arms gently opened to embrace Diana in a hug, but not so open that she dropped the contents of her arms. The two stood there a moment so Diana could collect herself. Kaitlyn knew that this would start the waterworks for Diana. She knew Diana too well. As they parted, Kaitlyn pushed the box of chocolates into Diana's hands.

"Don't judge the container; it was the only box of chocolates at the convenience store on my way over."

"You're seriously the best. I can't believe you stopped and brought me chocolate. Why don't men understand the healing power of chocolate?"

"Don't forget wine. Wine heals wounds that cut deep down to the soul," Kaitlyn jokingly added to Diana's statement while flashing her smile. A smile that also helped cut straight through Diana's frustration and stress. She was with her friend. Dare she say her best friend? They had undoubtedly been through a lot together. Whatever distance had developed between them soon disappeared as Kaitlyn got Diana settled into her couch, a glass of wine at the ready, a box of tissues on hand, and chocolates actively being devoured.

"Oh! Fuck! This is divine. You should have one. Have two!" Diana managed to get out after relishing the taste of a salted caramel chocolate.

"Those are yours. I've got my support right here," Kaitlyn said, holding up her glass of white wine.

The two women chatted casually for a half hour just to diffuse the anxiety and tension that Diana was so clearly carrying. Kaitlyn saw it right away when Diana opened the door. Her shoulders were hunched forward. A cardigan sweater was wrapped up tightly and buttoned all the way to the collar. She was wearing pants—just pants. Diana avoided unflattering pants like the plague, but she was wearing the least flattering sweatpants that Kaitlyn had ever seen Diana wear.

Kaitlyn's intuitions about Diana had been spot on thus far. As they settled into their second glasses of wine, Kaitlyn could see that Diana was finally starting to loosen up. Her posture became more relaxed, and she pulled her legs up under her on the couch and took that horrid cardigan off. The signs were working in her favor, so Kaitlyn decided to take her first stab at dissecting the turmoil in Diana's life.

"So what all happened today? It seemed like there was more to it."

"Hah! Understatement of the century. You know, the way people act, you'd think

people consider being female in public to be an open invitation to violate you," Diana replied with apparent frustration.

"Preach, sister. I know what you mean, but what specifically happened?"

"Leering, ogling, personal space violations..." Diana started as tears welled up in her eyes.

"There, there, honey. Here's a tissue. Go ahead and cry it all out." Kaitlyn came quickly to her aid.

Diana took a moment, then continued, "Fucking freaky Frank. He gave me a look that would freeze your blood. He's so creepy, but then the worst was my neighbor sneaking up on me at the gym, where we were all alone, and having the nerve to ask me out. Who does that? I had my back turned and was toweling off; it was a huge violation. I screamed in shock, but that's not enough for a man to realize he's overstepped. He went ahead and asked his question anyway. All the while, my head is running through threat analysis and ways to escape if it turns out he doesn't like my responses. FUCK! I hate men!"

"That all happened today. Yeah, fuck that. Fuck that straight to hell!" Kaitlyn offered in support of her friend. With a touch of catharsis being reached in Diana, Kaitlyn moved in and wrapped her arm around Diana to further console her.

"Totally agreed, men suck, but what about David? What's going on there?" Kaitlyn tried to push the healing and catharsis along.

"He... Well... **\*We\*** agreed to start over basically."

"That seems kind of drastic. Were things really that rough between you?"

"No. They weren't, and they still aren't. David thinks I need to be shown that his love for me will last."

"That sounds kind of sweet in a weird way. I don't get the connection to starting over, though."

Diana paused. With every ounce of her being, she wanted to just tell Kaitlyn that she had been 'David' a couple of months before. Diana's feelings of trust, respect, and loyalty to Kaitlyn made it agonizing to maintain the lie of omission. She knew it would jeopardize everything, though. Kaitlyn would be forced to report the crime of YourEssence abuse, or she could be held complicit in the crime as a co-conspirator. So, Diana steeled herself and crafted a white lie. Just a little one, one that David could see through but also carry on if the need arose.



"It's because we got married so young. He wants to show me that he'd go through the courtship process a thousand times if needed to prove his love. So he expects me to treat him like we barely know each other, and he will earn my love all over again."

"That's the weirdest and most romantic gesture I have ever heard. Men's brains just work differently. Men are from Mars and all that... Never seen an idea so 'out there' before."

"Yeah, this is a really special case. I wish he wasn't my special case, though. It would have been easier to get through today if he were around. He always knows just what to say..."

Kaitlyn pulled Diana in close, and Diana sobbed softly into her shoulder. Silently, Kaitlyn held Diana and gently swayed just the tiniest amount—enough to rhythmically reaffirm the bond and connection they shared in life and in the moment.

"How are you feeling?" Kaitlyn asked a few moments after she noticed that Diana had stopped crying.

"Better..."

"You sure?"

"No," Diana hesitatingly responded, but there was no evidence that she would continue crying. Kaitlyn's deep bond with Diana told her that Diana was on the path to healing. She just needed someone to continue to be there for her.

"I get it. I'm here for you, girlfriend."

Diana sniffled a bit and then sat more upright. "You've done so much for me tonight. You should get heading back to your home. I'm sure your hubby misses you."

"I doubt he even registered what happened when I left. He's oblivious, but he's sweet overall. He knows that I would do anything for you. So, you should know that too."

"I do! Your bona fides are clear as day. I just don't want you to have to waste any more time watching me mope."

"You can't waste time when you're with friends. That's just 'hanging,' and we're

plenty good friends." Kaitlyn recognized the pity party energy Diana was prone to. She had to act fast and cut the momentum off right away. "Hey, gal pal, can I hang out and maybe have a sleepover? I think it'd be fun. What do you say?"

Diana looked surprised for a second. She hadn't had a sleepover since high school, and the gesture wasn't lost on her, in any case. Diana smiled as she realized just how far her friend was willing to go to help her out. "Fine, but I get to braid your hair first this time!" Diana said, then chuckled at the silly premise of the two grown women braiding each other's hair.

"Ugh, fine... I'm giving you pigtails, though!" Kaitlyn rolled with the idea and added her own twist to the joke.

The two returned to the pattern they had grown used to from all their time together in college. Gossiping, swapping stories about which celebrity couple was the most desirable, and generally sharing their thoughts. They didn't actually braid each other's hair, but Kaitlyn did go down to her car to grab a prepared overnight bag she had brought with her so she could change into pajamas.

"You have grandma pajamas!" Diana teased.

"These are the peak of comfort, my dear," Kaitlyn retorted.

"Ha! I bet."

"Don't knock it until you try it. I brought an extra pair just in case something like this came up," Kaitlyn replied as she rummaged through her bag.

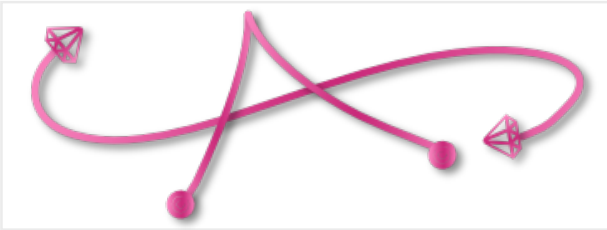
"No chance in hell!" Diana squinted her eyes and stuck her tongue out. Diana viscerally felt the cringe of having to wear something so frumpy.

"You got me... I don't have another pair," Kaitlyn replied. "I just wanted to see your face when I offered it."

The two women settled in for bed for the night. Diana offered Kaitlyn the second bedroom but insisted the couch would suffice. Kaitlyn had seen the spare room earlier. While she had wanted to broach the "having a baby" topic, seeing the spare bedroom let Kaitlyn know that was a topic for another day. Kaitlyn had heard how pregnant women 'nest' in preparation for a baby's arrival. Well, Diana had seemingly already prepared the room for a baby. The room had a crib, a nursing rocker, and even a changing table. Sure, there was a twin bed in there as well, but it was clear to Kaitlyn that this topic would need to wait for another time.

Mercifully, Diana nodded off to sleep moments after resting her head on her pillow.

Day one of her life as a 'single' woman was finally complete.



## Chapter 31 - Day 1, Redux

David, formerly Diana, woke earlier than usual that Monday. The sun peaking through the blinds shone at just the right angle to warm his face. Rubbing his hand across his face and chin, David felt his facial hair was getting a tad long. *It's such an odd feeling waking up with facial hair. I can't believe how fast it grows... I need to see what it looks like*, David thought as he bolted up and out of bed. His strength and physique allowed a more rapid and powerful exit from the mattress.

Standing in front of the en-suite mirror, David continued to run his hand along his chin. Turning side to side, David couldn't help but admire the masculine image he cut. For the vast majority of David's life, he had always maintained a cleanly shaven appearance. Today, there was an urge to go a different direction. *Maybe a goatee? Or just leave it as is? It's a bit scratchy, but damn... it looks good on me*, David continued his admiration.

"Shower first. I can decide later," David said as he caught a whiff of his body odor. I sure do get smelly quicker than... before. David acknowledged his new reality and set to the task of starting the shower. A moment passed to let the shower reach temperature, and David was soon immersed under the warm jets. Looking at the shower's contents, he saw that Diana had left her loofa. It was distinctively hers. Bright pink, fluffy, feminine. A reminder to David of who was no longer living here.

David was quick to move on from these thoughts. First things first, shampoo. A light pour of the mint and spring-fresh smelling masculine shampoo that David had used his entire adult life dolloped into his hand. David closed his eyes and brought the shampoo to his hair and scalp. He rapidly massaged the shampoo in and then turned his attention to his body. Pouring body wash gel into his waiting hand, David ran his hands back and forth against each other, building up a lather. An instant later, he applied the body wash to the typical culprits. Armpits, check. Crotch, check. Ass crack, yup, check; David ran through a personal little checklist. Satisfied that he had hit the major spots, David quickly, very quickly, ran the body wash over the rest of his body and then let the water rinse him clear of any remaining suds. Barely 2 minutes had elapsed since getting in the shower, and David felt that he'd tackled the fundamental necessities. Why had this always

taken so long... before, lingering on this thought afforded him no profound insight, so he got on with finishing his shower. After a quick rinse of his hair, David stepped out to towel off.

Fumbling to unravel said towel, he first brought the bunched-up fabric to dry the water from his face and hair. A momentary urge to wrap the towel around his head was dismissed as he unfurled the fabric further and dried his hair vigorously. A quick touch test confirmed the result. *So easy, what a bonus...*

After patting his chest and legs dry, he wrapped the towel around his waist out of a lingering desire for modesty. No one else would see him, but he still felt it warranted keeping up some habits. Checking his sink countertop, the only objects on the surface were his razor and his bottle of YourEssence. Opening the bottle and downing his pill, he uttered a little mantra, "To my good health." Turning his attention to the razor, he took one more look at his reflection. *This works... The facial hair. We're going to rock it today*, David thought, returning the razor to the countertop.

Stepping into his boxers, David scanned his closet for the pair of slacks he wanted to wear for the day. "Let's go with the blue slacks and jacket today," David announced to no one but himself. Finishing buttoning up the last button on his shirt, he grabbed the matching jacket and turned to head for the kitchen. He needed a cup of coffee, and it needed to be as strong as humanly possible.

The room looked starkly empty beyond the calendar hanging on the kitchen wall. Diana had taken most of the kitchen appliances with her, but David's trusty coffee machine remained. It was at least 30 years old. His father had given it to him when he left for college, and it had been with his father for many years prior. It wasn't a fancy or particularly capable appliance, but David had a fond attachment to it. Pulling the tray out to add his coffee and filter, David went with an extra heaping scoop of coffee. He wanted it to be strong.

With the coffee machine running, David turned his attention to the calendar. Flipping pages back to last month, he noted how much had transpired in such a short time. Things had really accelerated since that fateful day almost two months ago when they came back from their first counseling session with Dr. Simms. David's attention was drawn away from his thoughts as he heard the sound of coffee pouring into the pot. *Shit, I owe Brian that write-up. I guess I know who I'm going to see first thing walking through the door.* David suddenly remembered his incomplete work assignment. *He'll just have to wait. I'll get it done before lunch.* He continued justifying his prior decisions. David had purposefully chosen to defer this work. Ever since that incident with Tom, David's drive at work to go above and beyond had dwindled. Brian's 'try hard' energy just wasn't appealing at the moment, and David was trying to reestablish a balance with his work.

Pouring his first cup of coffee, David noticed he had inadvertently grabbed two mugs. "Just me today, but that won't be true for too much longer, heh," David said with a slight chuckle. Being the one in the driver's seat of his relationship had David feeling confident and self-assured. It was such a distinctly different perspective and experience. David felt like he could decide anything, do anything, go anywhere, and practically \*be\* anyone. Well, any man. There was no denying that his body's form and function were intrinsically linked. It was intrinsically empowering and emboldening, too, and David loved this fact. Diana would never have considered shirking a work responsibility, but for David, it was well within his reach to make that kind of decision. He was the master of his castle, craft, time, and energy.

Getting into his car to head to work, he lamented for a moment that cars were all self-driving now. He felt amped up. A little adrenaline rush during the morning commute seemed like a good release. *Too bad, I will just have to book a visit to the speedway for some horsepower-driven excitement. Maybe Diana would want to go with me? It could be a fun second date. A little thrill and excitement. Maybe even a little fear to draw her in close. It's bolder than taking her to a scary movie, at least,* David thought as his car automatically reversed from its parking spot before setting off on its predefined, ordinary, dull route.

When David arrived at his office, he was immediately ambushed by Brian. *Right on schedule...* David thought as he saw Brian approaching.

3... 2... 1...

"Hi Brian, good morning. I'll get you that write-up just before lunch. Did you have a nice weekend?" David preempted all the prompts that Brian was sure to unload on him.

Brian deflated a bit as David could tell that he had succeeded in his goal. Catching himself for a moment, Brian would not be deterred. "...Tom is asking about you. He seems to be trying to poke holes in the work you've been doing," Brian said with a wicked grin. Brian was acting bolder than usual. Given this new revelation and Brian's demeanor, David felt a bit of caution was warranted.

"Thanks for the warning, Brian. You've been with me through these last few months. You've seen the work I've done. Was I ever out of line?"

"No, never. That's what makes it all the more concerning. If Tom thinks he wants you gone, and there's no obvious reason, well..."

"Well, what?"

"...Well, he might just make it up. Then it won't matter if he can prove it or not. He'd just stick to the fabrication. If it's not something you could prove you 'didn't' do, then he'd have you right where he wants you. They might even try and claw back that big bonus you just earned."

David reeled at Brian's words. How could someone be so cold-hearted? Why would I deserve this type of treatment? Who do I have to punch to make this go away... David stood there now, visibly seething in anger. David's thoughts raced. Brian was now clearly trying to gain an advantage in the company's pecking order over him. *Thanks for having my back, Dick.* David chided his supposed work friend in his thoughts before moving on to a bleak realization. He was angry. Again...

He was not just angry because his boss was targeting him. No, 'Diana' had encountered that numerous times. Now, he was angry because he had let his success go to his head. He let his ambitions and pride cloud his judgment. He let his male body and the privilege that came attached be the source of his authority. He had been careless. After that first day, where he had revised the presentation so masterfully, David had fallen in love with the adoration that colleagues heaped on him. People listened to his ideas. They didn't make him repeat himself. His ideas were valid right away. Eventually, he kind of stopped trying as hard. He never should have let himself slip like that. He knew so much better than to do that. He had struggled so mightily at the university for the minimal improvements he could eke out. Now, he was the laggard do-nothing man who got everything he wanted without significant exertion. Now, he was a viable target for another kind of mistreatment. He was enviable, had attention, and had a bullseye on his back.

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Returning home, David sighed in relief that he had navigated the workday successfully. Brian got his write-up, Tom had been forced to publically acknowledge David's critical contributions on the most recent closing, and he had a good one-on-one with Pavan. Still, David's anxiety persisted through the day. A temporary delay would not deter Tom if he were convicted of wanting David to leave.

David, desiring a solution to his anxiety and workplace predicament, went into solving mode. As 'Diana,' his first instinct would usually be to garner support and feedback. 'She' was happy to let a problem linger as long as she was able to say her peace. Being a woman had trained this into her, or it was her nature; it was hard to say for sure. Now, as David, he wanted to move on so he didn't feel this way anymore. His thoughts were bold, big, and disruptive. None of them were dismissed. He considered going over Tom's head to Pavan. As today's one-on-one meeting had shown, his relationship was advancing with Pavan. Maybe in a month,

David could begin to drop hints of mismanagement. On reflection, David evaluated this solution as likely being too slow. Had he been preparing for this eventuality, he might have been able to turn the heat up sooner, but he hadn't done that work.

An even bolder idea was to reach out to the company he had just closed the deal with. They loved him. As a smaller company, David could probably leverage his experience and relationships to earn a Director-level position—maybe even higher. This had a lot of potential in David's mind. Several engaging evenings of wheeling and dealing had given David a chance to show his intellect and ingenuity. They had even gone as far as soft-offering him a job in jest. Maybe the jest was just for his current company.

David's last idea was to hit the job boards and refresh his resume. 'Diana' was an expert writer. She had to be as a professor. The academic community demanded it of its members. David's resume from three years ago was rough, to say the least. 'Diana' had tried to convince 'David' that she could help improve his resume, but he declined her offer. Now, that wouldn't be a problem. Ever the man of action, David had completed a refreshed resume within the hour. All he had to do was start sending it and his accompanying cover letters to senior management and director-level position postings.

Having several viable paths forward, David felt in control despite the threat of a competitive and hostile manager. David could feel the doubt of 'Diana' diminishing by the second as his bravado increased. He wouldn't pick one. He was going to do all of them. He reasoned it was better to have a lot of options than just a few. With a quick request to his virtual assistant, he had a new one-on-one series with Pavan for monthly follow-ups. He spent an hour writing a letter of interest to Henderson and Henderson Engineering's president, expressing his gratitude and interest in continuing to work with the company. And then he spent the next two hours sending in job applications.

His sense of value increased throughout the evening, and he began sending his information with a slightly revised resume to vice-president positions at appropriately sized companies. He laughed as he saw a VP job at UniGlobal come across his list. He could work for the very company that had 'made' him. He was an instant away from clicking submit before his senses returned. They would undoubtedly have more robust methods for screening candidates. He couldn't risk his and Diana's use of YourEssence being discovered. He closed the browser window and noted the time: 9 pm.

He had gone all day without a meal, but didn't hurt for it. His hunger cycles were nothing like before. He would get cranky if he went a few hours as 'Diana' without a small snack. He had gone over 24 hours today and felt only the slightest twinge. He checked the fridge and saw that there was nothing left. Diana had taken

everything she needed with her, and apparently, that was almost everything... shy of mayonnaise. Only David liked that.

David decided to eat out. A local diner would suffice, as he could get a greasy cheeseburger and fries and call it good for the day. Fortunately, he had just the place in mind. JJ's diner was about eight blocks away. Grabbing his phone, David was on his way. He smiled to himself as he exited the apartment. It always took a half hour to decide on dinner with Diana. The instant decision-to-action process of being a single man was delightful.

While walking down the street, most men ignored David. He was one of them, so there was no reason for their glances to linger. However, David did notice a few women's glances move along his body. He thought he should be sure to thank Diana for her former diligence in maintaining this body. Physical fitness had thankfully been a shared interest for the Martins, but 'Diana' knew of several girlfriends whose husbands let themselves go after their wedding.

Turning the final corner to the diner, David inadvertently collided with another person, sending them to the ground. David immediately began apologizing as he realized what had happened. The sudden shock surprised and disoriented him. A woman in her mid-twenties wearing professional attire and an attractive overcoat was on the ground due to David's carelessness. David's apology intensified as he realized his gaff.

To his pleasant surprise, the woman wasn't rude or angry with him. She actually laughed it off as he helped her to her feet. David was stunned. The woman was his height in heels, blonde, and an eleven out of ten in attractiveness. David held onto her hand as she regained her composure. After dusting herself off, she looked up and made deep eye contact with David.

"Sorry about that! I wasn't looking where I was going."

"No! The fault's all mine. I turned the corner blindly and too quickly," David answered. His own eyes remained locked with hers. He felt confused staring at this woman. Something he had no familiarity with.

"I'm Amber, by the way..."

"David! Uhh, pleased to meet you," David's response came far too eagerly.

"Well, I need to be going, David," Amber said, looking down at David's hand, which was still holding hers.

"Oh, of course! I'm so sorry," David said, releasing his grip. He half expected her to



run away on the spot, but she stayed put. He couldn't explain it, but he felt an urge to continue talking with Amber, "You, uhh, wouldn't want to grab a bite with me, would you?"

"Thanks for the offer, but I do need to go. How about I give you my contact. Hold out your phone."

David did as instructed, and Amber touched her phone to the back of his. David's phone displayed the success message for having added Amber's contact. She began to walk away, having heard the transfer confirmation sound emitted from David's phone, but she turned around a few steps away.

"I don't believe in games, by the way. The correct number of days to wait before contacting me again is one. Bye, David!"

He stood there dumbfounded. He had never experienced anything like that. Even as a woman who had been hit on regularly by all sizes, shapes, and levels of attractiveness of men. "Is this what crushing feels like as a man?" David wondered. He started to walk towards the diner again but was disrupted as his crotch had become painfully constrained due to his surprise erection. David tried to adjust his penis discretely, but the discomfort continued for a few more steps until he could get his mind off of Amber.

Taking a stool at the counter, David ordered his dinner and sat reflecting on what had just happened.

I've never seen a woman that attractive before. Or have I? Am I thinking as 'David' would? Or Diana? Why does that matter? I'm married... but also sort of not at the moment. Ugh, why is this an issue at all? Stupid body... Stupid erection... Stupid male libido... Stupid me. I can't believe I'm thinking this... Diana would be furious with me. But I feel like I owe it to myself to really know. Might I click with Amber? Is it fair that I'd only ever have sex with one woman? I agreed to let 'David' have my body. I had other boyfriends and wasn't a virgin with 'David.' And I know David wasn't a virgin. Maybe we need to date other people to ensure we are ready for our new lives to be our forever lives. Is that even a thing? No! I can't do this to Diana. God! This is harder than it has any right to be.

David's food was delivered, and he plowed through it with the same pacing any single man would. He was done in eight minutes flat. Paying for his dinner, the waitress winked at him, and he caught himself smiling. Then he cringed inside, realizing he had to resist his desire to flirt. He felt embarrassed that his instinct seemed to be to try and find more sexual partners.

He kept his head down and avoided eye contact on his walk home. When he

returned to his apartment, he locked the door and marched straight back to his bedroom. Stripping down to his boxers, he haphazardly discarded his clothes and crashed onto his bed. He made no excuses nor felt any need to explain himself. He went straight for his erection.

Hand at the base, he began pumping his shaft as thoughts of the blonde beauty lingered in his thoughts. His hand was increasing the pace as his body and mind imagined the passionate sex he could have with Amber. Shortly, spurt after spurt of cum shot out of his tip, and he winced in embarrassment. His mind was freshly cleared, and he felt shameful for his behavior.

David reflected that Diana didn't deserve to be mistreated after all David had put her through over the last several weeks. He felt ashamed that he had even considered it. David tried to explain his feelings away as being caused by his relative lack of familiarity with the male libido. He had never been hit on or flirted with. There had never been an opportunity for it to have happened before.

David cleaned himself up and pulled his sheet over himself. Lying on his side, his thoughts regularly bounced back to his shameful behavior and thoughts. He struggled to find sleep. Eventually, he started to justify his attraction to Amber as being natural for a man. He found excuse after excuse to try and minimize his shame.

As he fell to sleep, his mental exercise was working. He was accepting the naturalness of his libido.